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THE

LIGHTHOUSE.

A Novel.

BY

ELIZABETH HARCOURT MITCHELL,
AUTHORESS OF "FIRST FRUITS."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE LIGHTHOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

A CHARACTER.

I SOON lost the melancholy sensations I had experienced on leaving those with whom I had spent the early part of my life. The feeling of liberty, the constant change of scene, the joking of Merton, and the conversation of fellow-passengers, banished all melancholy regrets and retrospections. During the day, though, my thoughts wandered much back to the farm and the loved ones with whom I had parted, and I could not help saying to myself, "Now they are coming in to dinner from the morning's work—now they are putting up the horses—now they are off again—now my mother is taking her afternoon half-hour of rest and serious reading; I wonder if she thinks of me." But I did not *really* wonder, for my heart told me she did. And thus I traced all the daily proceedings at Oakwood, whilst I was being whirled away through towns and villages, and past parks and churches. At last we arrived at a cathedral town; how my heart beat as I saw the tall grey tower and the high-pitched roof rising above the neighbouring churches! I

had never seen a cathedral; and longed, whilst they changed horses, to run as hard as I could, and take a breathless nearer view of it.

"Nonsense!" said Merton. "You'll see St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey soon. Don't get into such a state of excitement about it. There! you're treading on my foot. Ah! do keep still. I wonder whereabouts and when we're going to dine. Here's an old gentleman coming out of the 'George,' I declare. What an old guy, to be sure! And he's coming up here, too, just as if we weren't crowded enough already!"

Up got the old gentleman, to Merton's great disgust, and away we went through the ancient streets, and out again into the open country. I proceeded to take a survey of the new passenger, and certainly his appearance was unique, though not as Merton had said, that of "an old guy." He was dressed in a very old-fashioned manner; I did not take so much notice of his knee-buckles and long white tie, for they were still worn by some of our neighbours who loved the ways of their fathers, but his coat was of such ample dimensions in the skirts, that he experienced great difficulty in comfortably disposing of it where he sat, and his waistcoat was halfway down to his knees. He had sharp, twinkling little eyes, that seemed to take in everything at a glance; and by his expression of scorn when he looked at Merton, I thought he had very likely heard my friend's disparaging remarks. I assisted him to arrange his ample clothing to his satisfaction, and made as much room

as I could for him, as I promised myself much entertainment from sitting next such an original being.

"Thank you, sir," he said; "you're a civil young fellow—know what's due to age. I suppose you don't know how to read and write, sir, do you?"

Much astonished at his question, I informed him that he was mistaken, and that I was a very tolerable scholar.

"Are you, sir? Sorry to hear it—never knew any good come of over-education. Thought you couldn't be a scholar, or else you wouldn't have wanted to help an old man. All that's out of date now, sir; young men go too fast to care about their elders—too fast a great deal, sir. They learn mathematics, and forget the commandments; that's the way to get on now-a-days. All education, sir—all education! When a servant comes to me, I say to him, 'Do you know how to read and write?' and if he says, 'Yes, sir,' I say, 'Good morning, sir; you wont do for me; you'll steal the spoons before next week.'"

"Cannot you write and read yourself, sir?" I asked.

"Of course I can, sir. Do you think I could have made my fortune without—I that was a little dirty boy, playing about the streets, without any shoes and stockings?"

"Then, sir—then why do you object to other people's trying to get up in the world also?"

"Because there are too many people trying to get up in the world already. Bless you, sir, the

world's full of them. Widen the sphere of competition, sir, and there will be pretty soon nothing left to struggle for. We shall literally be torn to pieces—torn to pieces!" he said, looking at one of the skirts of his coat which had got hooked over the rail. "Bless me! an old man like me ought to have gone inside; and I intended to, and I looked inside, and what do you think I saw there, —what *do* you think I saw there?"

"What, sir?"

"Why, a baby, sir—a *baby!*" he said, in a tone of horror. "Little, audacious thing! When *I* was a baby, sir, I used to stop at home; but babies in my day were very different to what they are now. I suppose the precocious imp wants to see the world! Ugh! All education, sir—entirely the fault of education!"

And the old gentleman's face got quite red.

"And where are we going to dine, I wonder? I suppose they'll hardly give one time to swallow a mouthful; they'll allow us about ten minutes to lay in provisions for as many hours. Our ancestors used to spend three hours at dinner—three whole hours, sir; think of that! They were at it regularly from ten to one, sir—from ten o'clock to one," he continued, repeating his words to make them more emphatic.

"What waste of time!" I thought to myself, but did not like to say so out loud, as the old gentleman, I saw, was one not to be trifled with. He went on grumbling and wondering when we were to dine; I thought the shortest way would have

been to ask the coachman; but I fancy my new acquaintance belonged to that numerous class of people who would be very sorry not to have something to grumble at. I thought he must be very hungry; so, opening the well-stocked basket my dear mother had put into my hands on my departure, I politely offered him one of the substantial sandwiches it contained.

"Not for the world, my dear boy!" was the quick reply to my movement. "I couldn't dream of such a thing; the very sight would take away my appetite for a month. What in the name of fortune can you carry about such abominations for? No, sir; a good old-fashioned hot dinner for me; none of your tough, stringy pieces of meat between two lumps of stale bread. I never ate a sandwich but once in my life, and I never intend to do so again. The bare recollection of it is quite enough."

I laughed, though not quite pleased at the cavalier way in which my mother's provisions had been treated, and assured him he need not fear a close examination of them.

"No, I thank you, I wont trouble you; but we ought to return hospitality, so I hope you'll do me the honour of dining with me when we *are* allowed to satisfy the inward man."

I assented with thanks; and before long we pulled up at a picturesque hostelry, where one of the old-fashioned coach dinners had been awaiting our arrival some minutes.

"I suspect you'll have to eat for me and your-

self too," said the old gentleman, with a face of disgust, "for I declare *that* baby is coming out. Why can't it stop in the coach, little audacious thing. Oh, if I wasn't so stiff with sitting here so many hours, I declare I'd have my dinner up here outside. Dear me! to think of that little precocious brat taking away not only my seat in the coach, but my appetite too!"

As it happened, however, the baby, its mamma, and attendants ordered a private room for themselves, so I imagined the old gentleman's choler would subside. But I was mistaken.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "To think of its being too good to dine with the other passengers! Must have a room to itself, little dear! This comes of education, I suppose. I'm an old gentleman, sir, and *I* can't afford to have a private room all to myself! Dear, dear, dear! what will the world come to?"

These remarks seemed to sharpen his appetite; he did ample justice to the viands before him, and pressed them heartily upon me. Merton laughed at me across the table, and the expression of his face said, "How quick you are at making new friends." The old gentleman seemed to have taken a great fancy to me; most likely because I took care not to contradict him. He had hardly settled the bill when the horn sounded, and we were warned to take our places.

"There!" he exclaimed; "told you so! Pretty state my digestion will be in! I shall have to lay up for a week after this! Wasn't so in *my* day.

Then we had time to turn round. I feel in a choking state, and the motion of the vehicle will shake me all to pieces. Here, waiter, a glass of brandy-and-water," he cried, laying down the money for it. It was brought to him smoking hot. Not perceiving this in his hurry, he put it to his lips, but still more hastily put it down again. Too —too—too went the horn, and the horses pranced impatiently.

"Just like 'em! they do it on purpose! brought it me piping hot on purpose that I mightn't be able to drink it. They shan't save it, though; I've paid for it, and I'll make use of it somehow," and he poured it into the gutter before the door.

Everybody laughed—but approaching me he muttered in my ear, "There's that baby again, sir. I thought it would have taken itself off at this stage; but no. I never yet set my heart upon a thing but what I was doomed to be disappointed. There it is inside! In *my* favourite place too; right-hand corner, facing the horses; the only place I care about, of course."

I condoled with him on this heavy misfortune, and he clambered up to his former place, muttering and grumbling all the time.

It was not very long before he drew out of me all my plans and history, and I was much amused at his comments thereon.

"Humph! so *you're* one of the discontented lot, are you? Well, I must say, young man, you're very foolish to go away from home, if that's the case. There people care for what you like, and what you

dislike; they humour you as far as they can; and you are to a certain extent of some consequence; but when you get into a crowd of human beings, nobody will care two straws whether you are crushed under a cart-wheel before their eyes. I know what it is. I've been struggling all my life, and I've got no friends; there's not a human being who would care if I were to throw myself into the Thames. You look as if you thought me a very grumpy old fellow—so I am. You look as if you thought me a misanthrope—so I am. I'm disgusted with the world, sir, and everybody in it. They're all either fools or knaves, distractedly fond of some other fools, or trying to cheat some other knaves. Did you hear that woman, sir, talking to her baby, 'Kitsy, Kitsy, Kitsy, wasn't it a little ducksy, wucksy, wucksy?' That's absolutely the foolish way in which she went on, sir. Faugh! it's quite sickening! And did you observe the guard trying to get another shilling out of that pale sanctified-looking woman in black, who got down before we went to dinner? If it were not so sad to see human beings degrading themselves in such a manner, life would be most amusing; but then one must have no feeling, sir—no feeling! I dare say now you think you're going to have a very happy life; going to enjoy yourself, and be a very merry and industrious man. I dare say you think you'll have heaps of friends and loads of money; but you needn't flatter yourself; your friends will deceive you, your money will go, your heart will grow sad; in short, you'll be miserable enough before you die!"

"And how about religion and doing good, sir?" I asked, wishing to see whether his opinions on those points coincided with the rector's.

"Religion, sir?" he said; "religion's grown a farce. It has a language of its own which cannot be understood by the common people. If you want to be thought religious now-a-days, you must talk about Zion, and turn up your eyes like this," and he made a most comical face. "Can I do that, sir? Do I look as if I could? Hasn't it a most ridiculous appearance?"

It had indeed, and I said so.

"Well, you see, then, it wont do for me to be religious. And as for what people call doing good, I'll tell you what that is. It is having a good dinner yourself, and then going well wrapped up, so that not a breath of cold wind may hurt you, into a poor man's house, and seeing the grate dark, and the cupboard empty, and the children in rags, and the parents thin from want of food, you say, 'Dear me, what an unwholesome atmosphere; cannot you put the windows open?' or do it yourself, letting in a rush of cold air upon the shivering inhabitants; and then you ask, why the husband does not go out to work, and express yourself much astonished at hearing he is too weak; and after questioning them in a way you would never presume to use with your equals, you leave them a shilling or some broken meat, and go home to your comfortable fireside, wondering why there should be so much distress in the world, and thinking how very badly they must have behaved to fall into

such difficulties. One wiser than you or I, sir, once said, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth;' but the opinion of the present day is, 'What everybody suffers serves everybody right.' Oh, but I forgot, when you visit a scene of distress, you must give a homily on contentment, which may thus be shortly expressed: 'My good people, I am very sorry for you, but you know it does people good to be miserable, and ill, and cold; *I* never knew what it was to want a meal, but I have no doubt it is a most holy exercise of patience, and very good for the soul; *I* never had a pain or an ache in my life, but I am told it is a great privilege to suffer; and so you should try all you can to be happy upon nothing, and contented with starvation.' This is no doubt how the poor would often translate the kind advice so freely given them."

I thought of the rector's kind, considerate manner to all the poor under his care, of his gentleness and respect for the feelings of others, and I felt that what the old gentleman said was untrue.

"You don't agree with me?" he said. "Well, your experience may have been pleasanter than mine. I hope it has, I'm sure. But you wont be long before you find out how very few people live up to the Gospel. Why, if a poor clergyman asks a rich man to give to a church or a school, he gets as many black looks as if he were trying to swindle him, and all letters relating to such subjects are contemptuously called 'begging letters.' It's too bad."

I thought the old gentleman was decidedly a poor man, for one seldom hears the rich speak evil of the niggardly. He went on talking and grumbling in this style, as if he had just been asking some one for assistance and had been refused. But soon the quick motion and the raw evening air made him sleepy; the grumble subsided into a low murmur, and presently he was comfortably dozing, having dropped his head upon my shoulder, greatly to my inconvenience, and greatly to the amusement of Merton.

It was quite dark when we arrived within the precincts of the great city I had so often longed to see. The lights were few and misty, the air raw and foggy, I was cold and tired, and altogether a feeling of disappointment stole over me. There was such a noise, it was quite bewildering; and I felt as if great monsters were rushing by us continually, and as if we must be swallowed up in the whirlpool of life. Presently the coach stopped before a well-lighted inn-door, and the old gentleman roused himself, and apologizing with a grunt for making a pillow of my shoulder, he got down, and was soon grumbling about his luggage. I wondered what I was to do when I had alighted; but my forebodings were quieted by a voice calling out,—

"Is Mr. Aylmer here?"

I speedily answered to my name, and a good-natured, business-looking man seized hold of my luggage, saying,—

"Mr. Vere sent me to show you the way to his

house; it's not far off; he's very sorry not to be here to receive you, but business kept him. Come along; it's cold standing still this weather." And off he went, I following him close. We went through a great many streets, all looking much alike, till we came to a narrower one, where there was very little traffic and very small houses. At the door of one of these he knocked, and the door was opened by a neat servant girl, who seemed to know directly who I was, and saying, "Missis is upstairs, sir, waiting tea for you," ushered me up the narrowest staircase I had ever seen. I entered with no small trepidation, wondering what kind of reception I should meet with from my future gaolers; for such I deemed them. I need not have been afraid. An old lady was seated at a table near the fire making tea, and the first glance showed me that I had nothing to expect but the kindest treatment from her. She was dressed in mourning, and wore a widow's cap, and there was that unmistakeable refinement in her voice, manner, and appearance, which captivates in the first moment of acquaintance. I saw directly that I should like her. I was not so sure about her daughter, who stood near her. She looked like one who had been accustomed to battle with the world. She seemed to be about twenty-six, but might have appeared older than she really was, and there was even a line in her forehead that betrayed all had not gone quite smoothly with her. Of course I could not see all this directly; I was too nervous to notice much at first; but I place my

impressions here, because they help to explain the characters I was to live with.

Both mother and daughter greeted me in the kindest manner; and I was soon seated in a warm corner, enjoying the good things that were pressed upon me, and giving an account of my journey. Mrs. Vere seemed quite engrossed with anxiety about my comfort; but I noticed her daughter sighed often, and anxiously looked towards the door. The rain had begun to fall, and the storm beat heavily against the windows.

"I wonder Ernest does not come," said the sister. "He never was so late before, and this night of all nights in the year, when I know he wanted to be home early. What can have happened?"

"Don't be over-anxious, dear Florence," said the old lady. "If anything sad had happened, we should hear of it soon enough. Ah! there he is! I thought it would be all right."

A merry voice was heard whistling up the staircase, and before he entered the room, a young man cried out, "Don't come near me yet, Florry; I'm all dripping wet. Never saw such a night in my life! Is our visitor come? I tried to get away early, but there was an unfortunate mistake in the accounts, and Mr. Lombard insisted upon keeping all the clerks in until it was cleared up. Hard fellow, Mr. Lombard; quite right though, all the same. I'll be down again directly; must take off my wet things; please to get some hot tea ready as quickly as possible." And he passed the door, and tramped up further still.

"Your brother doesn't seem unhappy at having worked so late," I said to the sister, who was busily occupied in preparing some hot toast and tea for him.

"Oh no!" she said; "the harder he works the merrier he is when he gets away. He looks dreadfully pale and tired sometimes, but he always laughs when I tell him so. We always used to live in the country; and though we have been here a long while, he has never yet got accustomed to town smoke and town fogs."

"No," chimed in Mrs. Vere; "but he will never take even a day's pleasure. He says he could not enjoy anything without us, and that people, not places, make his happiness. Ah, there are few like my poor Ernest!"

Hearing a person very much praised was sufficient in general to make me take a dislike to him directly I saw him, but on Ernest's appearance I could not help being favourably impressed. He greeted me in such a frank, pleasant manner, and apologized so politely for not having met me when the coach stopped, that I felt at once he was a real gentleman in mind and disposition as well as station. He was remarkably like his uncle, and I thought the rector must have been just such another when he was young. He was not exactly handsome, but decidedly attractive, with a bright expression of countenance, and a brisk, lively manner, which seemed to say, "I've come into the world determined to make the best of it."

"What a shame!" said Florence, angrily, "to

keep you at work so late. That's just because you're good-natured; they make you do everything."

"Not exactly," said Ernest, smiling; "they were all kept in just the same. I wish it had only been me, then I shouldn't have cared so much; but poor Davis was in a dreadful state of mind about his mother, who is dying, and he was so anxious to be back to stay with her all night, that I was quite grieved for him. It was too bad of Mr. Lombard to keep him when he knew what a state of suspense he was in, but I don't think men of business have much heart."

"And who made the mistake, after all?" inquired the mother.

"Why, Lombard's own son, careless young scapegrace; but don't let us talk any more about it, please; I can't bear to think of him and his bad ways, and it can't be very interesting to Mr. Aylmer. Let us have a good talk about the dear country; it is quite refreshing to see any one who has been so lately amongst green fields. What sort of a harvest have you had this year?" And he soon asked me a multitude of questions about the farm and my native parish, with the eagerness of an exile hearing of his own land. Then I described my journey, and gave a humorous description of the old gentleman who had so much amused me. This seemed to interest them all immensely, and Ernest laughed heartily at my account.

"I'm sure I know him," he said. "There can't be another like him. Was he dressed in a coat

with enormous skirts, and a waistcoat down to his knees?"

"Yes."

"And did he wear a long cravat and shoe-buckles?"

"Yes."

"And did he abuse everything and everybody?"

"Yes."

"Then it must have been my old friend, Mr. Beverley, who is the most extraordinary old gentleman I ever saw. How curious you should have met him. We'll go together and call on him some day. Was he in a particularly bad temper?"

"I don't know whether it was bad for *him*, but certainly it would have been considered bad for anybody else. He was in a great rage with rich people in general, and abused the niggardliness and hypocrisy of the age."

"Oh, then," said Ernest, "I know he has failed in what he went down to the country about. That's a sure sign of it. He is wild about establishing an asylum for decayed printers, or something of that sort, and was going to explain his plans to a rich cousin, and get him to join in the work. From what you say, I plainly see he has not succeeded in his wishes. He is very rich himself, but not rich enough to undertake a thing of that sort all alone."

"Very rich? Why, I should have thought, from his way of talking, that he was very poor. He abused everything rich, right and left, and said he

couldn't afford this and couldn't afford that, till I thought he must be almost a pauper. He insisted upon paying for my dinner, though."

"Just like him," replied Ernest. "He talks as if he were the poorest man in England, and yet he does more good in one day than most people in a year. His great desire is to have it kept secret from the world, and very often those he benefits do not know the name of their benefactor."

"Then how do you know anything about it?"

"Because I have often been honoured with the office of his almoner. You know somebody must take the money; and I have strict orders, when I do so, not on any account to divulge his name. When he subscribes to anything, he always does it under the name of 'A Friend.' He hates subscription lists, and often laughs at the way people's names are paraded, in return for a paltry donation. His great delight is to liberate poor debtors imprisoned for small sums; he does it at Christmas and at Easter. But such is his horror of becoming known as a benevolent character, that he deprives himself of the pleasure of doing it personally, and always commissions me to do it for him."

"Then if he does so much good," I continued, "I wonder he speaks so slightingly of religion. He said religion was all stuff."

"Did he? What a pity he doesn't speak a little more cautiously. He meant the pretence of religion; I have often heard him rail against that.

But I assure you there is not really a more religious character in London than quaint old Mr. Beverley. I believe he would like to be in church all day, if he could."

"How one may be deceived by manner and appearance!" I exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Have you only just found that out?" asked my new friend. "But we must not talk much longer to-night. You are tired to death, and I don't feel very fresh. Suppose I show you to your own little room; 'tis a tiny place, but the best we could give you." And I wished good-night to his mother and sister, and followed him up the stairs to a little room over the one we had been sitting in. But before we left the rest of the party, I had heard his sister whisper, in answer to some question he asked her, "No, not yet; some writing to finish. Up early to-morrow."

Ernest soon left me, and I had leisure to take a survey of my little apartment. It was very small, but clean and cheerful-looking. Besides the usual furniture of a bed-room, a little writing-table, apparently new, had been placed there for my special convenience, and on the dressing-table lay a Bible and Prayer Book.

"Oh, ho!" thought I, "so they are, as I guessed, a religious family. This is a delicate hint to improve my evening hours."

And I listened, and heard the sound of voices below joining in family prayer. "Why didn't they ask me?" I thought. "I wonder if they think I'm a heathen or an infidel?" And I was so angry at

this idea, that I would not say any prayers at all, and lay down to sleep without asking a blessing on my new course of life. What would my mother have said? But I didn't think of that, and soon fell asleep, to be roused several times by the squalling of the cats on the roof.

CHAPTER II.

NEW FRIENDS.

WHEN I opened my lattice in the early morning at the farm, the view that met my eyes could hardly be equalled in beauty. Everything looked so fresh and cheery, and there were so many pleasant sounds, that those who could spend the first half-hour of the morning alone, might lay up within their hearts a store of gladness to draw upon for the rest of the day. But here it was not so. I woke early, for the sensation of being in a new place prevented my giving way to morning drowsiness, and the feeling that I knew not what was going to happen to me that day, gave an excited turn to my thoughts. At the farm I could pretty well foretell every event of every half-hour; but now I knew very little of my future. The prospect from my window was not encouraging. I could see nothing but chimney-pots and a little peep of sky above,—sky, indeed! I could hardly tell whether it were sky or smoke, it looked so dark. Certainly this was not a pretty place, and what I had seen of London (that city of my dreams,) was not nearly so grand as I had anticipated. "Life is full of disappointment!" was my comfortable reflection while dressing; and then I began wondering when

I should get a letter from Mary. "Pshaw! how silly! when I have only left her a day!" But silly or not, I could not help it. I felt rather oppressed by a sense of loneliness, and wished I could hear the sound of my brothers' feet along the passage; and even longed for Tom to throw a pebble at my window, as he would sometimes do when I was late. Somehow or other I expected to feel quite different when I had left my home; but I found I had brought my old nature with me. I dressed quickly, and hurried downstairs to escape the torment of various reflections that would come crowding into my mind. I did not know what o'clock it was, but when I entered the sitting-room there were no signs of breakfast. Florence Vere was there seated at a table, which was covered with papers. She looked as if she were writing for her very life, and I did not think she seemed very well pleased at my entrance. She raised her eyes from her writing for a moment. I did not quite like the expression of her face, it was too stern to please me.

"Good morning, Mr. Aylmer; you are an early riser."

"Yes," I answered; 'I forgot to ask what time you breakfasted."

"Eight o'clock," was the concise reply. "It is barely seven now," and she busily continued her writing.

"You also are an early riser," was the trivial observation I made.

"Yes; if people want to get through any amount of work, they must make the best of the morning

hours. Have the goodness to hand me that penknife."

I did as directed, and passing close to her, saw on the heap of manuscript she was copying, the title, "History of the Captivity of the Jews, with a Discussion concerning the Ten Lost Tribes."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to say you're making a learned book like that?"

"Not exactly," she said, and something like a smile came over her rigid face. "I am only copying for the booksellers. But, after all, supposing I were, it would not be very extraordinary; for this is only a compilation; and I think I possess the moderate amount of talent requisite for such a work; I think I could make it a little more amusing too."

"But it looks so learned," said I, quite astonished at the contempt with which she spoke of it.

"Of course it does. That is the reason it will probably be very much thought of. But in reality it required very little learning to compile; a bit is taken out of one book, another bit out of another, and so on; the whole joined together, and made to appear the work of one man by a sort of running commentary, plentifully garnished with a number of Greek and Hebrew quotations. That's the way many great books are made, and then people say, 'What a fund of erudition the author must possess!' It is astonishing how easily people are taken in by the look of a thing!"

"What curious work for you to do!"

Miss Vere smiled at my exclamation, and said, "You may be sure I don't do it from choice; but, situated as we are, it would not do for me to be idle, and I was always handier with a pen than with a needle."

"If it is not impertinent to ask, how much do you get for copying?"

"They only give twopence a page, so you see it is not a very lucrative business. But it is something to be always employed."

"I beg your pardon," I continued, with my usual pertinacity and curiosity, "but would it not be a more agreeable occupation to take pupils?"

"In some respects it might; but there are two objections. Firstly, it would invade my dear mother's privacy, or prevent my being so much with her; secondly, I do not feel myself sufficiently well grounded in the grammar of foreign languages to be able to undertake imparting knowledge to others. If people would be satisfied with a solid English education, I might perhaps manage it, but then there would be the first objection still remaining. Altogether, it is just as well as it is; and I ought to be very thankful for having a quiet employment, which does not interrupt the routine of our daily life, nor occasion annoyance to my mother."

"Then this is what you meant when I heard you tell your brother last night that you had some writing to finish?"

"Yes. He wanted me to write to our uncle, and give him an account of you; but I told him it was

impossible for me to do so yet, as this manuscript will soon be called for. I must, however, beg you not to say a word to any one about my occupation; it is one of Ernest's weaknesses to object strongly to my undertaking it, but I have no idea of one of the family working hard all day, and the others doing nothing. It is neither desirable nor possible to conceal it from you, who are to be an inmate here; but I hope you are not so anxious to impart knowledge as you are to acquire it."

This was said rather sternly, and with somewhat of a sarcastic expression. I made up my mind at once. I did not like Miss Vere; there was something hard and unpleasant about her.

"Of course," I replied, "I shall not tell a soul; it is no business of mine, and I am no tale bearer." I thought all the time how astonished the rector would be if he knew his niece was working so hard, and how in a very little time he could prevent it; but here I was bound to secrecy in a moment. Well, it was no fault of mine, if Miss Vere did not choose to let anybody make her comfortable. I could not help saying, though,—

"I wonder what your uncle would say; he is rich enough, and would help you directly."

Miss Vere's countenance clouded, and that same expression of rigid determination I had before remarked again overspread it.

"I beg you will never mention such a subject again. We can get on very well without taking the portion of the poor. My uncle has enough to do in his parish, and dependence would be hateful to us all."

Dependence! I thought of the good, kind old man, all alone in his rectory, and felt convinced that did they only know him as I did, they would think it a blessed lot to be indebted to such a being. But still I admired their pride, it was in unison with the independence of my own soul; and I felt that these were people I could live with and respect. Respect, but not love. Why should Miss Vere have taken such offence at the mere mention of succour from her uncle? It was unnatural and unkind. She was very different to any woman I had before met with; not like my gentle mother, not like the charitable Miss Clarke; not like the warm-hearted Mary. She was *good*, I could see that by the expression of her eyes; but it was a stern, uncompromising sort of goodness. How little I knew the worth of the character I was studying! How little I knew the struggles daily and hourly it had to endure! The pinching poverty, the makeshifts to keep up appearances, the struggle to conceal all difficulties from the only remaining parent, the stolen evening half-hour's consultation with Ernest over embarrassments which must be met; all this I knew afterwards, but I did not know then.

I went on talking, for my curiosity was roused, and I forgot that Miss Vere had said she wished to make the most of the morning hour.

"In how much time do you think you shall have finished that?"

"That depends upon how many interruptions I have. Dear me, I wish people could write legibly;

there! I have made a blot," and she took the penknife to erase it. I was about to make another observation, when she resumed,—

"There is the last number of the 'Gentleman's Magazine' on the table. Do you think you could amuse yourself with it till breakfast time?"

I took the hint, and was soon deep in the account of some Archæological Researches in Wiltshire; not that I cared a bit about them, for I was watching Miss Vere, who continued writing at a tremendous pace, and methodically placing each sheet as she finished it on one side. She did not speak to me again, and the next sound I heard was the friendly morning greeting of her gentle mother. Much as I had admired this old lady the night before, I admired her still more now; she looked so fresh and pretty, moved so quietly, and spoke so gently, that I was quite in love with her. I thought Sophy would have been like her had she lived to be as old.

"Florence, don't put your eyes out!" she said, as she saw her daughter busily employed. "I dare say you have been at work ever since it was light, and you are so wilful, it is no use speaking to you. I shall tell Mr. Silverpen not to give you anything more to do."

"Pray don't, mamma. I should die, if I had not a great deal to do."

"Very complimentary to the society you live with," said the mother. "But never mind; I understand you; you're not so rude as you appear. Mr. Aylmer must be tired of waiting for his breakfast. Where can Ernest be?"

"Busy, mamma," said Florence. "He had some accounts to make up—his own, not Mr. Lombard's —I'll call him," and putting her things quickly together, she ran upstairs. It was some minutes before Ernest appeared, in great spirits, but looking rather pale and fagged. "London air, or rather want of air," I thought; "I wonder if I shall look like that soon."

We went into a little room downstairs for breakfast. It was a dismal little room, I thought, with blinds that prevented one seeing into the street, and there was nothing in it but a sideboard, a table, and a few chairs with horsehair seats; it did not look warm and bright like the kitchen at home. A Prayer Book and Bible were on the table; the same little maid who had ushered me into the house entered without being summoned, and Ernest read a chapter, and then said one or two of the Church prayers. It reminded me of home, and I had great difficulty in restraining my tears.

"I heard you reading prayers last night," I said, afterwards. "Why didn't you let me stay for them?"

"I thought you looked so tired," said Ernest, "and we didn't expect you to get into our ways the first night. It was a mistake, though, and I am glad to find you would have liked it."

Oh, then! the rector had not been telling him I was an irreligious character. That was something; there was no prejudice formed against me here. The conversation was kept up chiefly by Ernest

and his mother, for Miss Vere looked grave and pre-occupied, and I was engrossed by thoughts of what I should do next.

"What would you like to do to-day?" asked Ernest. "I must be off to work soon; but shall I walk with you first to old Matthew Capstan's? I suppose you'd like to know what you've got to do there, and meet your friend Dashwood. The first day, I shouldn't think they'd set you to work."

"Oh, thank you, I hope they will. I want to begin *directly*—directly," I repeated, with my usual impetuosity.

"Very well, then," said Ernest, "we'll go there together; and if you like, you can bring Merton Dashwood back with you to tea. I don't get out of the office till five, and it's a good walk home. Come along; good-bye, sister; don't work yourself to death."

"Not much chance of that with my mother in the house," said Florence, laughing for the first time since I had been in her society.

"You'll have to dine at an eating-house," said Ernest, as we walked down the long street; "but you wont mind that, I dare say. Near where you're going I can show you a capital place, where you can get first-rate beef-steaks and porter."

"Shall you dine there too?"

"No; my work's farther off, and the walk would take up too much time. I'll come and meet you after hours, for I don't think you'll find your way about easily quite yet. By-the-bye, how old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You look much older."

"I feel much older."

"And yet you're not so tall as most boys of fifteen. You think too much, I suppose, and that stunts your growth. Bad plan that; nothing like work, and hard work too, and then delicious rest."

"You seem to have a great deal to do."

"Yes, luckily, or it would be a bad job for us, I can tell you."

"I should like to be a banker's clerk, it seems to make you so merry."

"What an idea!" said Ernest. "What! learn double entry, and sit upon a high stool calculating, all the bright summer mornings and all the frosty winter afternoons? You don't know what it is. You'd find it a good deal more irksome than the farm."

"But you thrive upon it, and are more cheerful than I am; and you, too, were brought up to be a gentleman, which I never was."

"But don't you see, it's my *duty* to be a clerk, and that make's all the difference? Nothing's hard to do if you know you ought to do it, and what's more, you must do it. At your age, I thought I should have been something very different to what I am now."

"And are you not disappointed?"

"Certainly not. I am now twenty-five, and this is the happiest year of my life."

"You remind me of your uncle. He is always talking in that kind of way."

"Is he? I have heard he is a very good man, but have seen very little of him. I should be proud to be like him. What a curious ring you have on your forefinger."

I gave it him to look at, and told him all about little Beauty and his cross adopted father. He was much interested in the story, and said,—

"So Captain Dashwood is the man who recommended you to go to old Capstan? He is the very oddest old fellow you ever saw in your life; never speaks hardly, smokes from morning to night, and is so fond of ships that he spends all his leisure time in walking up and down the wharf, and going on board different vessels. He's very well known thereabouts, and people humour him, and let him have his own way. They say he's wondrous clever, and has done good service in his day. He left the merchant service because he got too infirm to go to sea any more; but his name is still passed on from one captain to another, and all are proud to send their sons to him. There's an ugly story about his being once engaged in some smuggling transactions, but that hasn't done his credit much harm. Few sailors think much about that sort of thing."

"How do you know so much about him?"

"Why, because I went to him to make arrangements about you; and then I had to make various inquiries of several people, before your father and my uncle were satisfied."

"What a deal of trouble I have given you!"

"Not at all; it's a pleasure to be useful. I dare say you'll do something for me some day."

To be sure I would, if I ever had the chance. I certainly did like Ernest very much.

"How good-natured you are!" I said, involuntarily. "You deserve to be something better than—than——"

"Than what I am," said Ernest. "Many people have said so, and I thank you and them for your good opinion; but I don't agree with you. I am put in the way of earning a respectable livelihood, and have two people to take care of, whom I love very much. I always have a warm welcome when I come home, and am blest by feeling I have done my duty. Many people would be glad to change places with me."

"But do you never wish for nothing higher?"

"There *are* one or two earthly things I should like very much; but not in the way of ambition," said Ernest, slightly blushing. "But I never make myself anxious about the future, because I am a Christian."

I did not understand him. I was a Christian too, at least, outwardly; but I felt often anxious about the future.

"And do you intend always to go on in this way—being nothing but a clerk?"

"I don't know. I can't tell. We don't know what may happen. All I know is, that I am doing right *now*."

"I don't think your uncle would like you to work so hard. I am quite certain he would prevent it; take you to live with him, at any rate."

"I know it. He offered me that at first; but

I was young and presumptuous, and thought I could make a fortune directly for my mother and Florence."

"But why not tell him now that you don't find it as easy as you expected?"

"Because it would be cowardly. And another reason, Florence would not like it. Florence has great ideas of self-reliance and independence."

"But is your mother not to be considered in all this? Surely she misses her country home."

"My mother's home is in heaven," said Ernest; "her heart is there now; and she is so engrossed with the thoughts of her soul, that I believe she hardly knows or cares where her body is."

"What an extraordinary state of mind to be in!" was all I could answer.

Ernest changed the subject.

"We are getting near your schoolmaster's house. Look, how grand the river looks, crowded with vessels! Beautiful as it all is, I would willingly change it for a sight of green fields. What crowds of people hurrying this way and that! Does it not make oneself feel insignificant?"

"Yes; but do you know, I don't like the feeling at all. I don't like being swallowed up in a multitude."

"You expect them all to touch their hats to you, I suppose, as they do on your father's farm," said Ernest, laughing.

"Not exactly. But it oppresses me to see such a torrent of human beings; and how fast they walk too!"

"Of course. They are all busy, or going to their business, like you and me. Now, you must work hard, and tell me what you have done in the course of the day when we meet this evening. Don't mind old Capstan's roughness; he's very clever."

By this time we had reached a crowd of houses on a wharf. There were warehouses without end, and all kinds of odd buildings, the use of which I could hardly make out.

"That's his house," said Ernest, pointing to an old blackish building, with a red tiled roof. "It's picturesque, but I can't say much for its beauty. You can go in yourself, for I must be off; I'm behind time already. Good-bye." And he scampered off at such a pace, that even the hurrying passers-by looked astonished.

I have given our conversation as minutely as I can remember it; but this was necessary, in order to show Ernest's character. The study of character was always my great delight, and traits of individuals imprinted themselves more deeply on my memory than hard facts. I knocked gently at the door indicated by my companion, and it was opened by a curious individual. He was an old man of muscular proportions, with a wiry and weather-beaten expression of countenance; his hair was lank and matted, and hung down on each side of his face, which had evidently not been shaved for several days; and his clothing was decidedly not that of a person who paid any attention to personal appearance. A rough blue jersey served instead of coat, and a red woollen nightcap

surmounted his untidy head. I could hardly believe this strange figure to be the celebrated Matthew Capstan. He was smoking a short black pipe, and on opening the door surveyed me with an air of quiet complacency, but spoke not a single word. I was embarrassed, for I expected to be received with open arms. He looked at me for some time; then with a muttered "All right!" beckoned me to follow him, and preceded me to an inner room, which was unoccupied by any other person, save himself and me. This apartment was evidently used for the purposes of instruction; a long bench with desks before it occupied one end, and there were various models of ships, and several nautical instruments lying about, without the least attention to order or arrangement. The room was gloomy and untidy; the walls were black and smoky; there were few indications of comfort; and altogether I felt inclined to wish myself away. He motioned me to a chair on one side of the fire-place, and took another opposite, still continuing to smoke.

"What are we going to do now?" I said, after waiting patiently for some minutes.

"Wait for t'others," was the reply.

I wondered who "t'others" were, but thought I had better wait and see, than risk the esteem of my new acquaintance by any indiscreet questions. I did not remain long in ignorance, for presently there was a rush at the door, and half-a-dozen awkward, rough youths of my own age bounced in, and just giving a "good morning" to their teacher,

seated themselves on the bench, and began working away at sundry calculations. They all seemed to know exactly what they had to do. One or two of them set to work at rigging various models, for this was part of old Capstan's system of instruction, and another I observed making knots and learning to splice.

"Now, then, youngster, let's see what you're fit for," said the old man, with a yawn. "Can you box the compass?"

"No."

"Then you must learn. Here it is; now set to work."

At this moment Merton Dashwood came in, and the room was in an uproar with his lively greeting.

"I'm not going to do anything to-day, old Cap, so you needn't expect it," was the familiar style of his address. "Come along, Jack; we'll enjoy ourselves for once, and see a little of London. Come along; no work the first day."

"But I must, Merty; I've got my work cut out for me."

"Cut it, then, for the present. Don't be stupid, now. Come; I've got lots to show you."

I was in doubt. After my protestations to Ernest of how anxious I was to begin work, it would seem very strange to pass the day in idleness; but then he had said himself that he did not expect Capstan would set me to work directly. It would be much pleasanter to roam about with Merton than to be poked up in that unpleasant room all day; the sun,

too, was shining so brightly! There was no use in thinking about it; I must go.

"Go along, youngster," said old Capstan, in answer to my look. "*You* wont stick to work for very long. Bring a slate with you to-morrow morning, likewise a ciphering-book, and two or three stout pencils, likewise a case of compasses, ruler, and all that, if you can get them."

I hardly listened to all these instructions, for Merton hurried me away.

"There, now, I can breathe," he said, as we came out into the bright sunshine.

I will not detail the pleasures of that day. We wandered about the whole of the forenoon in an almost delirious state of excitement at our freedom, and the abundant food for our eyes and mind which presented itself at every turn. We stood on the bridges, and watched the shipping on the river; we perambulated the little dusky streets and the closely-hidden churchyards; and then we took a higher flight, and reached St. Paul's, whence we proceeded to the Mansion House, the Exchange, and all those places I had heard so much of, but did not know when I saw them; and after rambling about the city until we were tired and hungry, betook ourselves to an eating-house, and dined quickly and voraciously, for we were anxious not to let any of our precious holiday time escape us. It was a strange sensation, that of walking for the first time amongst a multitude; it was distracting, and made me feel quite giddy. Merton was wonderfully cool, and seemed as much at home as in

his father's house. If it had not been for him, I should have been run over many a time. After walking a great distance, we reached one of the West-end parks, I forget which, but I remember well the delight with which I hailed the green trees, the fresh air, and the crowd of well-dressed people who seemed as if they had nothing to do but to enjoy themselves.

"Happy, happy people!" I thought; "you don't know what hard work is; you don't know what care is; you look as if you had holidays every day." Just at this moment a lady and gentleman passed us; we followed them a little way, and could not help hearing what they were saying.

"It's too bad of you, Sir Robert, to wish to keep me here all the winter. There is nothing so dull as London out of the season; 'tis as bad as the country in the summer; but you are so selfish. Business, indeed! A pretty excuse; as if the nation couldn't get on without you."

The gentleman made some deprecating reply in a low tone, but the lady resumed,—

"Contented, indeed! I'm wretched, I'm miserable; everybody's pleasure is more considered than mine. I'm sure I'm the easiest person to please in the whole world; I only want to have everything my own way, but you are so perverse."

Her husband seemed to be making some request, which was answered by,—

"Certainly not. I am tired to death. Nobody but you would have kept me out so long; but you have no consideration. I can't stir a step further.

I can dance, indeed! Yes, of course I can. That's quite a different thing. How can people be expected to walk in the winter, unless they have a band playing, and gravel the paths? Ugh! what a mess! Where's the carriage? I know I've caught cold. I feel a shivering all over me."

"What nonsense!" whispered Merton to me. "Look at all the furs she has got about her—muff and cuffs, and what a quantity round her neck, too!" We watched the couple until they reached the entrance of the park, when they got into a dark-green carriage, drawn by two beautiful bay horses, and drove away.

"There's happiness for you!" said Merton. "Why, old Dame Philips, who goes into the workhouse every autumn, and comes out every spring with the swallows, couldn't well be more miserable. What's the use of riches, I wonder?"

After spending some time in making our remarks on other idlers, we thought we had better be turning our steps homewards. We managed to find our way out of the fashionable quarters, and with the river for a guide, thought it would be as easy to return as it had been to lose sight of the precincts we inhabited. But to our dismay we found it was not so. We turned into street after street, but without finding the right one.

"We ought to have taken our bearings, as old Matthew would say," exclaimed my friend. "Catch me taking a walk in these parts again without a pocket-compass. What's the name of your street?"

"I forgot to ask Mr. Vere, and he never told me."

"Well, we *are* in a pretty situation," said Merton, seating himself upon a door-step. "Can *anybody* tell me the way to I don't know where? What is to be done? Oh, I know. You'd better come home to my lodgings, and then we can advertise, or send a crier, or something, for Mr. Vere to come and fetch you."

"But do you know where your lodging is?"

"No. 8, Suffocation-street."

"And how do you get to it?"

"That's more than I can tell you. Sing a song, Jack, and amuse me, for we shall stop here till to-morrow morning, unless we're turned out."

Merton was only in fun, but I really began to be frightened, when to my great joy a light, active figure advanced rapidly towards us, and I recognised my new friend, Ernest Vere. He laughed heartily at our predicament, and was not at all astonished at, or disappointed in me for wishing to see a little of the great city.

"I should have done exactly the same at your age," he said, in his cheery way; "but I am not sure that I should not have ascertained the name of the street I lived in before setting out on my travels in that wild manner. But what have you seen or done? I hope you'll bring home a budget of news for my mother and Florence at tea-time; their life is very much the same day after day, and it will be quite an event for one of our household to have been so far west this same afternoon." And

he gave his arm to me after having kindly shaken hands with Merton. To my surprise, we were not so far off our destination as I had imagined; but the streets looked all so much alike, that my country eyes were completely puzzled.

"Have you had a hard day?" I asked.

"Very hard."

"And are you not very tired?"

"Rather; but I shan't be when I get home. My mother and Florence have such a knack at making the house comfortable. It always seems to me a little paradise after the bustle of the streets, and the toil of the office."

Very odd, I thought, to call that little dark house in a close street "Paradise;" but there's no accounting for taste; and Ernest looked at the poky narrow staircase when we entered as if it had been Jacob's ladder reaching up to heaven. The old lady and Miss Vere were sitting just in the same place where I had seen them on my first arrival. The tea-table was drawn to the fire, and it was right substantially supplied. They were delighted at our early return, and welcomed Merton very heartily.

"And how goes on the writing?" said Ernest to his sister.

"All finished," said Florence, with an expression of great pride. "All finished, money paid, and more work promised for to-morrow. Am I not in luck?"

"Who says women can't work as well as men?" said Ernest, turning to me. "Well done, Florence, you're an honour to your country."

"Oh, it's a pleasure," she replied; "it makes the day seem so short; and then I can talk to mamma all the time; for copying is nothing, you know."

"*I* shouldn't think it nothing if I did it," said Merton; "there is nothing I hate much more than the sight of a pen."

"Well, it doesn't matter for you, you know, as you're going to be a sailor; but don't let us talk about work any more now, we shall have enough of that to-morrow; we'll enjoy ourselves to-night, and do nothing but pleasure. I wish we could put the drag on old Father Time's chariot for a few hours."

We told them all our wanderings and adventures, and Merton had a comic style of relating the most ordinary incident, and making it appear highly ludicrous. His was a jesting style of talking, which was more amusing on a first acquaintance than afterwards, for everybody gets tired of hearing things perpetually turned into a joke. However, he succeeded admirably in entertaining the little party in that little poky house; and shouts of laughter rewarded him as he mimicked the voice of the luxurious lady in the furs, and showed her way of walking, as if the ground was not good enough for her to tread upon. Then he told some of his father's stories, with which he had so often amused me; and also gave us a little history of Matthew Capstan, who had been an old messmate of his father's; telling us how he used to be addicted to dram-drinking, and would in the middle of a voyage call to the cabin-boy to fetch

him "a drop of fresh milk," in so loud a tone, as to deceive the more gullible portion of the passengers.

The meal was spun out, in order to afford plenty of time for conversation; and afterwards, when the table was cleared and we all drew round the fire, it was still kept up with unabated vivacity. Merton did not seem at all inclined to go, and the moon was shining above the chimney before he showed the slightest intention of moving. How I envied him his self-possession, and the unembarrassed manner with which he introduced anecdote after anecdote, and stated his opinions upon no end of subjects, always taking care, as I afterwards recollected, to find out those of his hearers first, and chime in naturally and gracefully with them. For so young a man it was wonderful; but then I recollected he was older than myself, and I thought that in a year or two I also might arrive at the same proficiency. We had settled to go out again that night, and see a little of the entertainments of the town, but I felt so exhausted with our rambles, that I mentally hoped Merton would postpone his plans for my edification and his own amusement. But all of a sudden he started up, wished our hosts good night, and turning to me, said quietly,

"Come along, Jack, I've a deal to show you yet."

"Another night, then; I'm tired."

"Tired? pooh, nonsense! You'll be so amused, you wont be tired yet, I promise you. We'll be

in time to get in half-price at one of the theatres, if you make haste."

Ernest, who had been engaged in a low-voiced conversation with his sister, here looked up, and asked what we were disputing about. When he heard, he looked very grave, and strongly advised me not to go. But the spirit of perverseness had seized me, and I did not at all approve of his interference.

"Indeed, but I think I shall, though; and perhaps you'll come too, Mr. Vere."

"No," replied Ernest, smiling; "I value a comfortable evening at home rather too much to waste my time in such a fashion. I'd rather pay full price not to go."

But the same rule didn't hold good for me. Mrs. and Miss Vere were not *my* mother and sister, and I didn't see why I should be kept at home to entertain them all the evening. Opposition made me wish very much to go. Merton kept impatiently twisting the handle of the door, and waiting for my answer. Florence watched us with an unmoved and rigid countenance, as if she were passing judgment on our characters; and the old lady quietly took her spectacles off, and prepared for a nap, as if she took not the slightest interest in the question. They looked as if they were going to be very dull indoors; and no doubt the brother and sister were anxious to have a little chat together; so all things considered, I would take myself off with Merton. On announcing my intention of

so doing, Ernest said, in his quiet manner, with just the slightest turning down of the corners of his mouth,—

"And who do you think is going to sit up for you, young man?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure. The servant, I suppose, or any one will do. I'm not particular; of course, I shouldn't expect you or Miss Vere to do so."

"No, I should think not. But please to take note that we lock up immediately after your friend there leaves us, and don't open again until seven o'clock to-morrow morning; so if you like to remain out all that time you can do so, but it wont be comfortable this time of year." Then he whispered to me, "Don't force me to say no; I have my orders from your father."

This settled the question at once; I saw I was a prisoner; and Merton departed, a smile of derision on his lips at the state of durance in which I was kept.

"I hope you're not disappointed," Ernest said, as the door closed. "I hope you wont mind staying at home with us in the evenings; and if you will only wait till Christmas, we'll make up a party and go and see a pantomime; it's quite natural you should like to have a little amusement."

This was not at all what I had intended. I thought Merton and I should have had our evenings together, free from interruption and interference; but it was not to be so; and I found I was to be as much under control as at the farm. I re-

mained in a sort of angry idleness after Merton's departure, and made no answer to Ernest's kind proposal. He went on talking to his sister, heedless of my sulkiness; and the old lady was still quietly dozing by the fire. "Would you not like to write home and tell your family of your safe arrival?" he said, seeing me gazing listlessly into vacuity. The very thing I ought to have thought of, but I was so selfish, I had forgotten it. I assented, somewhat sulkily, and Ernest jumped up to get everything for me. He looked so like his uncle, as he sat gravely mending a pen for me, close to the candle, that my thoughts went back to the study at the rectory, and the studious summer evenings spent by the open window. My first letter home! I had never written to any one before, and was quite ignorant of how far down the sheet I ought to begin, how it ought to be folded, and nameless other little things, those unaccustomed to writing have no idea of. The work of composition was slow; for though I could write verse with ease, prose was very different. Of course the letter was addressed to my mother. However devotedly a son may love his father, it is nearly always to his mother that he writes his first letter. Ever enthusiastic about what I happened to be doing at the moment, I was soon absorbed in my occupation, relating my journey; my meeting with Mr. Beverley; my impressions of Matthew Capstan; my rambles that day with Merton; winding up with a glowing eulogium of Ernest's kindness, and imparting my awe of the terrible Miss Vere. How

little did I think when I penned those lines that I should once more describe those very same scenes, once more describe them with a breaking heart, in a desolate habitation, apart from all mankind, and not knowing whether a single soul would even read the record of the past! I that was once so rich in friendship and in love!

CHAPTER III.

THE PHILANTHROPIST.

FOR the first fortnight I was tolerably contented and happy. I had plenty to do, and the days passed quickly. I had only one fault to find, which was, that the dispositions of the members of the small family in which I was domesticated were so equable, that there never was a chance of hearing anything like a repartee or dispute, or "anything to make a house a little lively," as I termed it. The great object, the life-long ambition, the dearest pride of the brother and sister seemed to be that no worldly cares should ever disturb the mind of their calm and saintly mother. Not that she was a nonentity in the house; on the contrary, they took delight in referring many little matters to her, and nothing was done without her consent and approbation; but it was all put so easily before her, that it was evident the subject had been well talked over beforehand. I heard afterwards that Mrs. Vere had been induced to give up the housekeeping entirely to her daughter, ostensibly because the latter wished to save her the trouble, but in reality that she might know nothing of the care that was making Miss Vere prematurely old. So the old lady was kept in a state of compara-

tive ignorance, and had no idea but that it was the easiest thing in the world to pay the bills every Monday morning. Meanwhile she laughed heartily with them at little troubles, occasioned by their economical way of living.

"Do you know," said Ernest to me one day, "that the only time our little maid Betsy was ever known to be in tears, was one gala day with us, when old Crotchet and Quaver came to tea here? We had not enough cups of the same colour, and Betsy cried, because we were obliged to have four blue cups and one white one. She said it looked 'so shocking,' and that she shouldn't have cared so much if they had been even the same size. She thinks now, I believe, that the white tea-cup has disgraced the family for ever."

"And who may Crotchet and Quaver be?"

"Two curious ancient damsels, who teach music, and call themselves our cousins; though neither my mother nor myself know upon what ground they claim relationship with us. Their real names are Miss Frizzle and Miss Agatha Frizzle, but we call them Crotchet and Quaver, because the eldest is full of fancies, and the youngest is so timid, that she trembles like an aspen-leaf when anybody speaks to her, and never sleeps at night for fear of thieves. They are good old souls, and manage to earn enough to support themselves; they go out to play at parties for three-and-sixpence a night each; but their chief support is from giving music lessons to small children in these parts. They don't often come here, they're so busy; but you're

sure to see them on Christmas-day; my mother likes them to dine here, as they have no relations, and two don't make up a very merry party by themselves."

The Veres always went to church twice every Sunday, and I went also, not because I liked it, but because I was ashamed to stay away. Ernest was often shocked, because, he said, "I went for the sermon, and not for the service." In truth, my mind had not much to occupy it, save in criticising the preacher's arguments and delivery, for all the time of the prayers it was wandering to the four quarters of the globe. I never could keep my attention to anything for long together, unless it was completely new. The sermons I heard were generally too dry and logical to be interesting, more like a chapter of Locke than an exposition of the Gospel; but it was an amusement to me to follow out the argument, and try to arrive at a different conclusion to that of the preacher. Ernest called this perverseness, and said I should never prosper if I looked at religion in such a purely intellectual manner. One morning there was a collection for schools, and the sermon was preached by a stranger. It was eloquent, forcible, and made a most favourable impression upon all who heard it. We were enchanted; and on coming out of church I begged Ernest to find out who the preacher was, saying, I was sure he must be a celebrity, a dean at the very least, or perhaps one of the king's chaplains. The next evening he said, "Who do you think your celebrated preacher has

turned out to be?" I was in breathless expectation. "Mr. Brown."

"Mr. Brown?" I said. "Who is Mr. Brown?"

"A broken-down clergyman—very poor, and old before his time, from care and sorrow. He has no cure now, but manages to earn his livelihood by taking a few pupils, the sons of tradesmen, who want to have their children made gentlemen for next to nothing."

I was loud in expressions of indignation at the obtuseness of London in general for allowing such talents to linger in obscurity.

"Softly, softly," said Ernest. "Do you suppose that promotion goes by merit in this world?"

"Of course I do. At least, I believe it ought."

"Then what would be the use of the next world? Besides, all positions are useful. I dare say Mr. Brown does an immense deal of good by instilling unworldly principles into the hearts of those who will be exposed to all kinds of mercenary temptations. I hate to hear people talk of a man's talents being buried; how can they be buried whilst they are being used at all? A friend of mine, on leaving college, went into a country parish in an obscure district. It quite provoked me to hear lamentations made over him: 'Such splendid talents to be buried in the country—what a pity!' As if there were not souls to be saved in the country as well as in the town! I only wish it were *my* fate to be buried in the country!" said poor Ernest, reverting with a sigh to his cherished wish. "But it is wrong to wish. Few people have more bless-

ings than I have. I often dream, though, of primroses and apple-blossoms. Oh, Johnny, what could possess you to leave the farm for such a dingy place as this?"

Ernest had a small collection of books, some given him by Mr. Beverley, others relics of past and prosperous times. Some of these were old and curious volumes. He was particularly fond of the literature of the sixteenth century, and several ancient works, too learned for me to appreciate. I had the liberty of borrowing any of these possessions without asking leave, and Ernest was never better pleased than when I pored over an obscure passage with him, or compared notes about some favourite poem. He often displayed much learning and elegant taste in the remarks he made, and would take any pains to elucidate a difficult paragraph. I said to him one day, "I dare say you'll be a great man one of these days, if you try."

Ernest laughed heartily. "Not the least chance of such a thing, even if I wished it. I have not a spark of original genius; I can only appreciate the genius of others. But, indeed, ambition is not much in my line, at least, not that sort; of course, every person must have some sort of ambition, if they are good for anything. I'll show you my notion of it, if you like; it's in some verses I have somewhere."

"Did you make them?" I said, with some surprise; for Ernest did not appear to me to be a person who would make poetry.

"Oh no! but the ideas are mine. I told Flo-

rence what I meant, and she put it into verses. When I want an idea written down neatly, I always tell it to Florence."

The verses were as follows:—

No earthly feast can satisfy
This longing, earnest heart of mine,
For evermore it looks on high
For holier bread and wine.

No jewel's sparkling light can snare
Mine anxious gaze a second time,
For I have made it all my care
To seek *one* Pearl sublime.

No flower can match in perfect bliss
(Tho' sweetest flow'rs their perfume yield)
The Rose of Sharon, and for this
I search the dewy field.

With eloquence of word or pen
My burning thoughts were never shod,
For other men would speak to men,
But *I* would speak to God.

No honour in the world is worth
A thought, were every honour given;
He scorns the highest place on earth
Who seeks the last in heaven!

"Do you understand what I mean?" said Ernest.

"I think I do; but I don't quite agree to it. That is too contemplative, too quiet for me. I like something more stirring."

"Why do *you* not try literature?" said Ernest. "You seem to have original ideas, and you are full of ambition; you would find occupation and excitement in it after a time. Now, I hate excitement,

and I fear am rather given to idleness, though I stick to business, because I am obliged."

"I don't like in-door work," was my reply. "It might give me plenty of occupation, but I don't exactly want that. I want change of scene every day, every hour, if I could get it. I want to do something new and strange. I hate regular work. Look at these calculations I must get up for old Capstan by to-morrow; it makes me quite uncomfortable to look at them."

"And yet," said Ernest, "you've taken more pains in writing them out than you need. Look at these red lines, and all those flourishes; it would have done quite as well if you had written it out plain."

"Yes; but don't you see, it would not have looked half as pretty? Now, the red lines attract the eye, and break the dead appearance of so many figures. Besides, old Capstan didn't tell me to do it, and I like sometimes to do what I am not told."

Ernest laughed. "It seems to me that you would save yourself a good deal of trouble by doing exactly what you're told, and no more."

"Oh, that's because you are a clerk, and obliged to be exact; but you wouldn't think so, if you were me. I say, Mr. Vere, how much more amusing decimal arithmetic is than common arithmetic, isn't it?" said I, as I moved off to the little table appropriated to my evening work.

I have not much to tell concerning the hours spent at Matthew Capstan's. The course of instruction was very regular, and everything he said made a great

impression, because he never said a word more than was necessary. He sat smoking his pipe, in a state of apparent indifference to everything that was going on, but in reality his eyes and ears were open, and his hands ready to pounce upon any offender who was taking advantage of his teacher's abstraction. I was rather awed by the gruffness of his manner, and the wonderful tales Merton used to tell me of his past life; but, either owing to former acquaintance with his father, or to his own charm of manner, Merton was a much greater favourite with the old man than I was. Merton could do anything with him—go in and out of school just as he liked; and if he did not appear for two or three days together, the delinquency passed unnoticed. On the contrary, I dared take no liberties, and the old man frowned terribly if I failed to comprehend his concise and sailor-like instructions. He used often to call me "an idle young dog," and I in my heart anathematized him as a sulky old bear. I was obliged to pay the most minute attention to what he said, for he would never repeat it, and woe be to me if my roving thoughts could not be kept in due order. I knew little of his history. He was supposed once to have been a master in the royal navy, and to have been cashiered for some misconduct; but this was only tradition, and nobody could bring anything forward really against his character. Then, it was said, he commanded several merchant ships one after another until incapacitated by infirmities, when he took to keeping a school for the sons of his

former friends and associates. I was kept in much stricter order here than I had ever been before, and began to experience the bitter truth that home discipline is the lightest of all. Merton, too, did not seem to care to be so much with me as he used; he had many new friends; for his disposition was so sociable, it could not rest satisfied with one or two. So I saw little of him except in school, and this was my first great disappointment concerning human affection. I asked him once why he no longer sought my society as he used, and he answered,—

"Because you belong to a different set entirely. You are always with the saints, and I sometimes like the company of what your strait-laced friends might call sinners."

"But do you remember our last walk in the country, when we agreed time should never change us, but that we should spend all our leisure moments together, and compare notes about everything?"

"Yes, of course I do; and our nearly running slap into poor Jane's funeral. How romantic we were, to be sure, at that time! Ah! practical life makes a great change in people," said he, shaking his head with all the wisdom of sixteen.

"A great change in *some* people," said I; "but my friendships last a little longer, I hope, than yours."

"Why, what can you mean? Did I not beg you to come out with me that very first evening, and you refused; at any rate, allowed yourself to

be caught like a rat in a trap, without making an effort to disengage yourself? And now, do you not always go about with that sanctimonious, hard-working friend of yours, who is a very Molly, and thinks it recreation to stay at home with his mother and sister? And then you come and reproach *me* for changing! No, no; if you'll get out of their clutches, and make your father let you come and lodge with me, you'll find me just the same as ever."

I made no answer to this tirade, and Merton walked away, whistling.

I soon received an answer to my letter home. It was written by Tom for my mother, whose education had been confined entirely to a knowledge of religion and of housekeeping, with other useful motherly arts, and who consequently was unable to write, and had no time by after-study to repair the deficiency. It was dictated by her, however, and was full of considerate kindness and good advice, together with all those little bits of home intelligence so unspeakably precious to the absent. But days passed on, and I received no letter from Mary. I had half expected one; for though she did not fully assent to my proposition, she did not refuse to comply with it. I was much disappointed and half angry at her silence; but at last the idea struck me that she might not like to be the first to begin a correspondence, and the more I thought of it, the more I felt convinced that this was the true reason. She might think it unmaidenly too, or her mother might put a negative upon her wish,

or George's influence might go against her intentions; there might be a thousand reasons for her silence. I resolved to write first. Common civility must call forth a reply of some sort, though she might never write again.

With a trembling hand I indited a letter, telling her everything that had befallen me since my arrival in London, and begging a similar minute account of all that had taken place at Little Dale. In a large round character I directed it to

"Miss Mary Alton, Little Dale Farm, ——shire,"

and took it to the post-office surreptitiously, so afraid was I that any one should see the address, and turn me into joke concerning it. I had sealed it with a seal, bought on purpose, representing two hands joined together, with a motto over them, "Till death us do part." I thought this very beautiful and poetical, and felt convinced it must call forth some demonstration of tenderness in return. But day after day passed away, and no answer came. I felt enraged beyond measure at what I deemed her heartless conduct, and almost resolved to give her up entirely. But one day Ernest, who could not help seeing how anxiously I watched for letters, bounded up the stairs to my little room, shouting, "A letter! a letter! and eightpence to pay." I gave it him, and when he departed locked the door, that I might feast undisturbed upon the precious treasure. It was as follows:—

"MY DEAR JOHNNY,—

"I had your letter a long time ago, but before you went you never told me in what street you were going to live, and when you wrote you never put the name of the house in your letter. I thought of writing to you to London, but George once told me, when I asked him what kind of place it was, that it was nearly thirty miles round, and as he is a surveyor, I suppose he must know, though he has never been there. That being the case, I thought it no use to write to you until I had found out exactly where you were, which I did last Sunday, when I met your brother Tom going out of church, and he wrote me down your direction. Perhaps you may think I could have found it out before, by going to Oakwood; but it has been a busy time here, and we have been knitting all the winter-stockings, so I could find no time to get to Oakwood, and mother could not spare me. George has been here lately several times, and always asked after you, and how you are getting on. His master is very well pleased with him, he says. He told me he had been at your home a few evenings ago. He found your friend the sea-captain smoking with your father, and a foreign boy playing in the orchard with your brothers. I suppose you have heard what a good season for apples this has been; but eggs have got very scarce, even as early as this. Nine fetch a shilling when you want to buy, but when you sell you can only get ninepence for the same, which is strange. I went to market for mother last Saturday, quite alone, for the first time.

I was so proud, and sold the things very well. I found the basket rather heavy, but coming out of the town I met George going in, and he was so kind as to turn back with me and carry it home. It was very good-natured of him, for it must have hindered him sadly, as he had to go into the town again afterwards; but he never thinks of himself. Miss Clarke has been ill lately; mother let me go a day to nurse her, as she likes to have me with her when she is not well. She, too, asked much after you, and said she hoped you were getting steadier than you used to be. She was sorry not to have seen you to wish you good-bye. Poor Jane's mother is gone away out of the country; she thought you were coming again to see her before she went away; she gave me one of the little baskets Jane had made a short time before she died, and said I was to keep it for you, as she was sure Jane would have liked you to have it. I am afraid you will find this letter rather hard to read, but I only write a bit of it every night, as I have no time in the day. Mother says she will not have letters coming here directed Miss Mary Alton; she says that if you choose to make yourself into a young gentleman, I am not to be made into a young lady. I wanted mother to let me have a donkey to ride to market on, but she says if I am getting too fine to walk, I had better not go to market at all. I suppose she is right; but Susan Baines, of the Green Farm, always rides to market, so I thought I might. Which is market-day in London, and do the women there ride don-

keys or cart-horses mostly, and do they wear grey or red cloaks? Please write and tell me all this; only mind and direct the letter to Mary Alton, not *Miss*. We are to have a new churn against next summer, as the old one is nearly worn out. George was telling us about a new-fashioned one he heard of, but mother does not like new-fashioned things, and says the old fashions will last out her time. I nearly forgot to tell you that your friend the captain has given Tom a bottle with a flying-fish in it, and Alfred a ring made out of the vertebræ of a shark. It has the captain's initials on it, and the name of his last ship, the 'Minerva.' The captain told Tom, Minerva was an old woman who sold apples on the quay at Lisbon; but George says that's all nonsense, and that Minerva means the goddess of wisdom. Old Richards, the squire's cowman, frightened poor old Dame Philips out of her senses by declaring her pig was bewitched, and that he saw it with his own eyes last Wednesday evening up in a cherry-tree biting off the branches; but mother says it was monthly market-day, and old Richards must have been the worse for drink. Mother drank tea with the housekeeper at the Hall on Thursday; the squire's lady wants a great many fowls, and mother went to take the order. She heard that one of the young gentlemen is going for a soldier, and there is a talk of one of the young ladies being married, but do not say anything about it in London, for mother says we ought not to repeat people's affairs. Two soldiers came begging to the door the other day; they had tattered old red coats, and mother gave them some

cider, but not any money, because she said she did not know whether they were real soldiers. The knife-grinder, too, has been here since you left; also a travelling man with a monkey and an organ; so you see we have been quite gay lately. The rector gave me a book on Sunday, called 'A Clergyman's Advice to Young Women,' but I have not read it yet, as mother says she will not have me waste my time over books before all the work she has to do is done. We are not going to churn any winter butter, but have enough salted to last till next summer. I must stop now, for mother says she cannot keep the candles burning all night for *me*. When you have time I hope you will write again. I have been many evenings writing this, and George bought me some new pens last market-day on purpose.

"So no more from your friend,

"MARY ALTON."

Every word of this letter is graven in my memory. I kept it many years; and for months after I had received it, read it every day with more attention than I had ever given to the Bible. But though I treasured it thus, I was not entirely satisfied with the tone of it. It spoke so much of George; he seemed to be getting so intimate at Little Dale. All was referred to him; and he had even bought the pen that wrote this letter. This was all highly unsatisfactory; but then Mary seemed so pleased at my having written, and had bestowed so much labour and pains in answering my letter, that I solaced myself with the hope that I was the pre-

ferred one, after all. Poor Mary! unconscious object of my jealousy, she was only a child, and ideas of marriage had never entered her head, and if they had, would have been quickly chased away by her unromantic mother. It would have been better for me had I been kept in the same tutelage. It may easily be imagined that I did not allow the correspondence to drop, although two or three of my letters generally counted for one of Mary's; and I wrote to her almost oftener than to my own family. I have often wondered since how such a precise, old-fashioned person as Mrs. Alton allowed this constant communication, especially as she was thrifty, and postage was expensive; but I fancy it ministered in some way to her own amusement, and all country people like to hear about London, and all aged people are fond of news, however much they may pretend to the contrary.

Mr. Vere did not forget his promise of taking me to see the eccentric old gentleman I had met in the coach.

"He will be an interesting person for you to know," said he; "there is nothing commonplace about him; but you must take everything he says with a qualification, and never believe anything he says about himself."

"But do you not think that very wrong?" I asked. "Why should he try to deceive people, even though the deception does no harm? I know many people do it, but I should not have suspected it of such a good old man as you make out your friend to be."

"It certainly *is* wrong," replied Ernest. "But he says that so many people are intent only upon showing the best side of their characters, that he is tired to death of all the affectation of virtue there is in the world; and would rather show the worst of his just for a little variety. So his actions belong to himself, and his words to an affectation of harshness it is his fancy to indulge in."

"He told me that he had not a single friend in London; that not a soul would care whether he were dead or alive, and yet he has yourself, and by your account many more."

"That is just like him," said Ernest, laughing. "His eccentricities and his virtues make him sought after by many people, (for do what he will, he cannot prevent some knowledge of his deeds getting wind,) and lion-hunters would give the world to have at their tables the rich and benevolent Mr. Beverley. But he will not have much to say to any of them, and infinitely prefers a quiet evening at our house to all the enjoyments they would hold out to him."

"Has he any relations?"

"None, that I know of, except a rich cousin whom he always raves against on account of his miserly propensity. I have often heard him say, 'Ah! I suppose James thinks he can square all accounts with Heaven at his death, by leaving his money to some hospital! As if Heaven cares for that which we want no longer, and would not give up, even at death, if we could help it!'"

"And I suppose you see Mr. Beverley very often?"

"Yes; for he has a great fancy for me; and though he has many acquaintances, he has few intimates, so I make it a point to pay him every attention in my power."

"But are you not afraid that he will think you do so on account of mercenary motives?"

"I never trouble my head about what people will think. It is very cowardly to allow the fear of being suspected to prevent you from doing what you know to be right. Why should he and I be deprived of the pleasure of friendship, because *somebody* might think, that *he* might think, that *I* might think, that *he* might think, of leaving me his money?"

"Very true. But you never seem to care what anybody thinks. Now I am always worrying myself in some way or other about what I fancy people are thinking."

"That is a very bad plan. Why should people think at all about such insignificant beings as you and me? They are all busy thinking about themselves and their own concerns. All we have to attend to is, how we stand with Heaven, and the more we think about that the better."

By this time we had reached Mr. Beverley's door. The house he lived in was a dark, gloomy dwelling in Bloomsbury-square; it had a great heavy kocker, which required much strength to lift.

"We must not stay long," said Ernest, as he struck it against the massive door; "he always sups early and doesn't like to have his hours disarranged."

"I thought great people generally dined at this time of day, not supped," said I.

"So they do; but Mr. Beverley keeps to the ancient fashions; besides, he would be very angry if he heard you call him a great person. He says his origin is as low as anybody's, and he is rather proud of it than otherwise."

The door was opened by a grave-looking man in black. We were ushered up a wide, dingy staircase; and as, duly announced, we entered a large apartment containing confused masses of furniture, I perceived my friend of the coach bending down over a heap of papers which lay before him on a small table in the corner of the room. He jumped up when he heard our names, and his little grey eyes twinkled behind his spectacles, as he perceived his favourite Ernest. Remembering Vere's warning, I thought the old gentleman would pretend he was not glad to see us, but I was mistaken, for he came forward with an animated manner and outstretched hands.

"Ah, my dear Ernest, I *am* glad to see you. Where have you been all this time? I thought of going to look you up; but I have had so much to do with all these wretched people's absurdities. I've been made secretary to the Provident Institution of the Halt-Blind-Deaf-and-Dumb Society, and have no end of trouble with the subscribers. Confound their stinginess! Here's the young gentleman who wants to reform the world; have you reformed yourself yet, young man, hey? ha? hum?"

I did not exactly know how to answer the ques-

tion, but I need not have been embarrassed, for the old gentleman did not care to have a reply, and went rattling on his own way.

"How are they at home? how's your dear good mother, and the majestic sister? All well, eh? that's right. *You* don't look well, though; you look pale, and you're getting thin. Come to the light, and let me look at you," and he dragged Ernest to the window. "Ah! I see how it is; you're overworked, poor fellow; you must come down to the country with me next time I go; remember, I'll take no denial. Impossible, indeed! I should like to hear anybody say that what I choose to have done is impossible! I say, Ernest, are you sure there's nothing else to make you look ill? nothing *here?*" pointing to his heart.

I could not help observing that Ernest blushed very much, and immediately changed the subject.

"Any news in the paper, Mr. Beverley?" he asked, not at all, though, as if he cared to know.

"How should *I* know?" continued our eccentric friend. "What do you take me for, that I should have time to read such trash? I've other things to do besides running after news. The less *I* hear of news the better, I can tell you—it only provokes me, irritates me. I see bad people getting up and good people going down; I see base motives assigned for every good action; I see that the country is going to rack and ruin, by letting a parcel of political swindlers into its councils; and I see a number of hideous murders and horrible accidents, each one of which is enough to make a man trem-

ble for a month. That's what I see by reading the news, sir, so I don't do it! I leave it for idle young people like you, who are fond of novelty, and have nothing to do but to run after it."

Ernest smiled, and looked at me, as much as to say, "You see I was right."

"Well," continued Mr. Beverley, "does that old skinflint, Lombard, go on in the same exacting manner he used? I wonder you stay with him; I wonder you don't get a better situation; but young people have no energy, and go on day after day plodding in the same dreary manner, and never looking after anything new. They haven't half the spirit of the old ones. When I was your age I had tried twenty different ways of earning a livelihood.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't quite suit me," said Ernest. "I don't like change, for I often think it might not be a change for the better, if I were to make it. Things are all settled for us better than we can arrange them."

"Ernest Vere, don't you be a fatalist. Heaven wont help you unless you exert yourself. But you mustn't mind me to-day. I'm in a bad temper. I've been harassed and provoked in more ways than one. I've been running about all the morning, trying to get some money. Some money for a great scheme, for the amelioration of the human race; and I went first to one man whom I knew to be amiable, and a friend of mine, and rich, moreover, and he has no wife, no child, no anything, to be a drain upon his purse. Well,

this man is called a naturalist, and I found him sticking pins through poor, unfortunate, dead butterflies! which *I* should have imagined to be a most unnatural proceeding; the room was full of dreadful creeping things, at least things that had once crept, and stuffed monstrous, ugly lizards and toads, and such like objects, and a heap of tangled weeds were lying on the table waiting to be sorted and dried. As I came in I could see by his face that he wished me at the bottom of the sea, but I was determined to tell him the object of my visit. 'Oh,' said he; 'really I am very sorry—very sorry indeed, but I haven't anything to spare just at this present moment—I—I—sympathize deeply in what you say—it's all very true—but I have so many calls upon my purse.' At this moment he was interrupted by a servant coming in and saying, 'The man's come, please, sir, to take the order about the new cabinets.' I saw how it was, so took my leave, and left my friend to give orders for expensive habitations for his dead pets, regretting that he should be so blind as to prefer them to his own poor, suffering fellow-creatures. And so I proceeded somewhere else, but each time to meet with the same response; everybody was engrossed with his own pursuits. And yet these people are not unkind; many of them I know to be of most excellent dispositions, but none of them will take the trouble to look into things, and none of them think anything can possibly be of more importance than their own petty pursuits. That's what vexes me; if they were wicked, I

shouldn't care; but they are such pleasant, agreeable, kind-hearted people that it makes me furious to find that they don't see things in the right light."

"Perhaps they have good intentions, but don't see things in the same light you do."

"Now, don't be making excuses for everybody, Ernest," continued the old gentleman. "I wont have it. Directly I say anybody is egregiously in the wrong, you are always trying to find out that they are in the right. It is quite absurd, and the way to make yourself very disagreeable. When you see that a person wishes to abuse another, you should always let him. Contradiction only makes him more determined upon doing so."

During this conversation I was amusing myself by examining the room. It was as full as it could hold of all kinds of miscellaneous articles, which looked as if they could never by any possibility be reduced to anything like proper order. I thought the old gentleman must have been to several auctions, and bought up everything he saw. There were pictures for which there was no room on the walls, engravings lying about on the chairs, heaps of books on the tables and off the tables, whilst the mantelpiece was crowded with jars of various sizes, goblets, and vases of all descriptions. There were also two or three sideboards in the apartment, which looked out of place in a drawing-room, as even my unpractised eyes could tell; but indeed one could hardly call the place a drawing-room, it looked more like a large warehouse.

"Ah, I see you're astonished," said Mr. Beverley, remarking the manner in which I was scrutinizing his dwelling; "I haven't built my storeroom yet. Certainly these things are not well arranged. I must see about it some day."

He tried to persuade Ernest to stay to supper. I should have liked this, for I wanted to study further this kind old misanthrope, but Ernest was, as usual, in haste to go home, and declined the offer so heartily pressed upon him.

"I say, Ernest, I suppose I may come and dine with you on Christmas-day as usual?" he asked, as we took leave.

"Certainly, we shall be only too happy; only I should have thought you could have found pleasanter and gayer society elsewhere."

"No, Ernest, no," said the old gentleman, with a sigh, and the door closed behind us.

"It is very odd," said Ernest, as we proceeded on our way home, "that Mr. Beverley should be so much fonder of our society than of anybody else's. He always likes to dine in our little house on Christmas-day, in preference to having a party of his own, or spending the day with some of his rich friends, and sometimes he comes on a Sunday also."

"I do not wonder at his liking to be with you," was my reply; "but perhaps he has a fancy for Miss Vere—I mean, perhaps he would like to marry her. Such things have happened, you know," I continued, half frightened at the boldness of my suggestion.

"Oh no! impossible," was Ernest's quick answer. "I have heard him rave against matrimony a thousand times; and Florence is not at all the sort of person to fall in love with. She is too grave, too practical; in short, it couldn't be. And he is so old too."

"Old gentlemen often do foolish things," I thought to myself; "and as to his raving against matrimony, why, according to Ernest's own showing, that is just the very sign that he secretly approves of it." But I said no more on the subject, and Ernest proceeded to enlighten me concerning many of our old friend's habits.

"Did you see," he said, "what a quantity of rubbish cumbered up the room? That is because he buys everything that people want to sell him. Bad pictures, stupid books, second-rate engravings, second-hand furniture,—all go there, for he never will refuse anybody. He has not an idea of arrangement, and does not know where to put his things when he has got them; but he gives away quantities to young tradespeople about to marry, or to anybody who likes to have them. This is one of the ways in which his benevolence shows itself; but it is rather inconvenient to his visitors, for often there is not a chair to sit down upon, they are all so laden with purchases. Look there," continued Ernest, "do you see that tall, gaunt man coming towards us? that is one of your ambitious ones; he is Franz Kauffmann, the artist."

"A German, I suppose?"

"No, not exactly; of German extraction, but

brought up in England. He is wild to make a name, but has no wealth and no influence."

At this moment the artist approached us, and seizing Ernest energetically by the hand, he entreated us to come into his studio.

"It's close by, you know," he said; "and I haven't seen you for an age. Do come; I have new sketches to show you—new designs, and the cartoon for my great picture."

Ernest, ever ready to oblige, couldn't refuse him; and we followed the tall, wild-looking man, whose eyes brightened with unnatural fire at the prospect of getting some one to enter into his views and pursuits.

"Come in, Vere," he said, opening a door, without ringing or knocking, and hastening up a narrow staircase. "The rooms are small, but the light is well arranged; and that's the chief thing for a painter."

The studio was a double room, the light coming down through a skylight; the walls were hung with pictures and sketches in different stages of progression, and the presence of easel, brushes, and array of colours showed the purpose for which it was designed.

"Well, have you got any orders?" said Ernest, coming to the practical part of the conversation.

"Yes," replied Franz; "but one which no man of genius could accept. To paint the portrait of that ugly Alderman Heavyside and his fat wife. It is true they are rich, and would pay handsomely; but I cannot thus lower the glory of my art."

"Well, I think you are very foolish," said Ernest, in his matter-of-fact manner. "If you were to paint what would bring you some money at first, you might in time get rich enough to indulge your own fancies."

"What!" exclaimed the enthusiast, "bind myself down to drudgery, when I have such glorious pictures floating before my mind's eye? Look at this cartoon," turning a large sketch towards the light. "What do you think of this? It is Leonidas and his three hundred in the Pass of Thermopylæ."

It certainly was a magnificent sketch. Even I, whose unformed taste had had little opportunity of indulging itself, was struck by the grace and power of the design before us. The figures were drawn with wonderful force; the canvas was not overcrowded, though the terrible confusion of a battle was energetically represented, and each group possessed an interest of its own, not, however, derogatory to the principal point of effect, which was the figure and attitude of Leonidas, across whose face shot a ray of light from between the broken masses of stormy clouds that formed the background of the picture. Franz watched our admiring gaze with evident delight, and pointed out the different figures with the enthusiasm of one entirely engrossed in his own work.

"And when are you going to begin painting it?" asked Ernest. "Are you not anxious to begin?"

"That I am. But where is the money?" and a shade of sadness passed over the artist's features.

"Some one must order the picture first, and it will cost nine hundred pounds. It has been the cherished child of my leisure hours, for I could not afford to give up more than a certain time to it, and I cannot tell when I shall ever have the happiness of beginning it. One by one, hope after hope has fallen to the ground; I worked for two years at a picture of the Death of Cæsar, upon which I rested all my hopes of fame, sent it to the Academy; it was returned with a large 'R' chalked upon the back of it. I tell you, Vere, I was nearly mad when I saw it; a horrible impulse seized me, and I snatched a pistol, determined to put an end to my unfortunate existence, but some one hastily entered the room, and I was saved—saved to hope again, and to despair again!"

"But why need you despair?" said Ernest. "Were I in your place, I would accept every offer of employment that presented itself, from whatever quarter; you are sure then to make friends and obtain patrons; and then who knows? People may hear of your talents, your design, and some rich man may step forward to enable you to carry it into execution."

"No, Vere, no. That hope has long passed away. And yet it is strange, when I see what dunces obtain fame and riches, that I should be left in poverty and obscurity—it is a wondrous freak of fortune."

"Say not a freak of fortune," replied Ernest; "say rather it is permitted by Heaven, that your faith and your endurance may be strengthened and

exercised. Good will come of it, you may be certain."

"I doubt it," replied Franz; "my energies are cramped, and my brain at times seems clouded. Continued disappointment is wearing me out."

I could not help being amused at the manner in which Ernest tried to comfort him.

"Never mind, Franz," he said; "what does it matter? You can't help knowing you are a great painter; you must know it; and if other people don't know it, it can't really make any difference to you. You have enough to live upon; you are not actually in dread of starvation; and as to empty fame, after all, what is it? If you are the lion of the town for one year, somebody else will be the lion for the year following, and you will be forgotten or neglected."

"You mistake me," said Franz; "I don't want to be the lion of the town, and I don't want the fame of a year. I want the fame of centuries, the applause of posterity."

"And what good will it do you after you are dead?" said Ernest; but seeing that the observation gave Franz pain, he continued,—"If you are a great painter, Franz, which I am sure you are, it cannot make you greater to hear people say so; and if they choose to say you are *not*, or to say nothing at all about you,"—Franz winced at this,—"why, that cannot make your talents less, or prevent you from knowing the truth."

"All that is no comfort," said Kauffmann. "Unacknowledged genius is nothing but torment."

"Do not speak thus of Heaven's best gifts," said Ernest; "they may be unacknowledged on earth, but they are not so in heaven, and you will have to give an account of them."

Franz shook his head mournfully, and turned his sketch with its face to the wall, whence he had taken it. Finding he could say nothing more comforting on the subject, and that Franz was too much engrossed with his own dreams and sorrows to care about talking on common subjects, Ernest took a kindly leave of him, and we proceeded on our way again, I pitying and sympathizing with him, Ernest pitying also, but rather provoked with him for not having the patience to work his way on slowly through ordinary channels.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS-EVE.

I WAS soon a very great favourite with Mr. Beverley. He was pleased with my fearless way of proclaiming my opinions; and though in theory extremely strict on the subject of youthful deference to elders, he did not carry out his own principles, but allowed me to say what I pleased, and to be as dogmatic and presumptuous as my wilful nature prompted me. He told Ernest I was the most amusing young person he had ever met with; and people will forgive a great deal of indiscretion, provided that indiscretion be entertaining. He listened to all my wild projects with the greatest interest, and sympathized profoundly with my dislike of conventionalism, and my hankering after some unattainable good which I could not specify. This was strange; for his own character had always been persevering, active, and devoted to one aim at a time; and why he should take a fancy to me I could not divine; but there is no end to the inconsistencies of human nature. Before Christmas I had got very intimate with Mr. Vere, and always called him Ernest. He was so much younger than his age, and I was so much older than mine, that the disparity of our years was forgotten in our intercourse. I could perceive,

however, that there were depths in Ernest's heart to which I should never be admitted. Miss Vere was a very different character. No one would dream of calling her Florence. There was something about her which made every one treat her with the greatest respect; a certain strength and self-reliance was apparent in everything she did, and a decision which some fastidious persons might consider almost too great. The painter, Franz Kauffmann, and Mr. Beverley seemed to be Ernest's only intimates, with the exception of young Davis, a fellow-clerk, who was a mild, affectionate person, almost broken-hearted at the loss of his mother. I had a great veneration for Ernest's character, and this was increased tenfold by a little circumstance that happened a few weeks after my arrival. I observed that though he would not let me go out, he about that time began to absent himself in the evening for an hour.

I was very curious to find out why he did this, and where he went, and I took courage to ask Miss Vere one night what had become of him.

"Why does your brother go out so regularly, and where does he go?" was my officious question.

"Ask Ernest when he comes back," was the dry reply.

I did, but only got this reply,—"Oh, only a little matter of business. Nothing worth speaking of." This did not satisfy me, and I was determined to find out the mystery; so I watched one evening when the old lady was asleep, and Florence busily occupied with some papers, and slipped out of the

room behind Ernest, without being perceived by him or the others. He shut the house door himself, so there was no chance of my getting out that way, and so I had to go up the area steps, which occasioned the loss of a few seconds. Ernest always walked very fast and straight forwards, without looking either to the right or to the left, so I was perfectly safe from observation in following him at a little distance. The night was damp and rainy, and I felt almost sorry at having resolved to gratify my inquisitive propensities. Ernest did not walk far. He turned down a little alley, and knocked at the door of a very small, mean house. I had to wait a little while until he had gone in, and then approached the door, which had not yet been shut by the poor, wretched-looking woman who had opened it.

"I'm a friend of Mr. Vere's; can I wait for him?"

"Yes, sir; shall I show you upstairs?"

"No, thank you; I'll find my way myself." And up I went, very much puzzled as to what I was to do next. I heard the murmuring of voices inside the room upstairs, and stopped to listen. Then Ernest began to read, and I heard the words,—

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

I was thoroughly ashamed of myself. Here he was comforting some poor creature, and I had suspected him of going out to amuse himself; and

shutting me up, that I might not interfere with him. I sat down on the staircase, and could have wept with remorse at my base suspicions. And then I remembered that I did not know my way home, and that I should be obliged to wait for Ernest's guidance.

I went quietly down the staircase, and waited at the door. Presently Ernest appeared. "You here!" he exclaimed. "How good of you to come and meet me. It really was kind. But how did you know where I was? Did Florence tell you the way?"

"No, Ernest," was my answer, for I was too miserable at my misjudging him to deceive; "I suspected you of going out to amuse yourself; so I went behind you like a spy; because I was angry at your forbidding me to spend my evenings with Merton; and I thought I should find you at a theatre, or perhaps smoking and singing somewhere; but I found out what you were about, and I could kill myself with anger for having suspected you."

"Don't do that, pray," said Ernest, laughing. "I am glad you have convinced yourself—seeing is believing. You see, Johnny, I am a very vain sort of person, and would fain believe myself to be of use to those beyond my own immediate circle; at any rate, to one or two, for, of course, it is but little I can do. Oh, if you only knew what depths of misery there are in this great city, you would never rest until you did something to alleviate it."

"But if there is such a mass of misery, what can one person do to make things better? Their greatest efforts must be like a drop of water in the ocean."

"But do you not see," replied Ernest, "that if each person did a little to alleviate the misery of one other person in poorer circumstances than himself, the world would be better by half than it is now?"

"Very true; but other people wont do their part; so what would be the use of our exertions? If others would back us up, well and good."

"At the last day," said Ernest, very gravely, "we shall not be asked what other people have done, but what we ourselves have done."

This argument was conclusive; but I could not help saying,—"I should not have thought there was any call upon you for such exertions, because, as it is, your life is spent for others. You work all day for your mother and sister, and you are ready to do anything they please in the evening. You do everything for those who have claims upon you. I should have thought you might leave other people alone, without being very sinful."

"I consider that other people have claims upon me after I have satisfied those of my family. We are all related, because we are fellow-Christians; and we ought to look at things in a grand way, take a bird's-eye-view of everything, and then we shall be happy and useful, wherever we may happen to be placed. It is a very bad plan to narrow one's sympathies. But I will not tease you

with moralising, and I am sure I don't know what I have done to call forth this discussion. One would think I had been doing something grand, instead of only just reading a chapter to a poor old blind lady. I wish you had come up; I should have been glad to have introduced you to her. She is so contented and good, in spite of her afflictions."

Wherever I go, thought I to myself, I am sure to hear of some one in great distress and affliction, who is perfectly contented and happy. And yet they call this such a wicked world! Truly, I begin to suspect I am the only wicked person in it, for I never feel contented; I am always wanting something, and when I get it I do not feel happy. By this time we had arrived at our own door, and Mrs. Vere and Florence looked surprised at seeing me enter with Ernest. "We thought you had gone to write in your own room," said Miss Vere; "what induced you to follow Ernest?"

"Never mind," said Ernest, who answered for me, being evidently afraid of my betraying my reason. "I was very well pleased to find him outside, I can tell you. I never like walking alone when I can get a companion."

"Ernest," said the old lady, putting on her spectacles and taking a look round the room, as if seeing would make her express her ideas better, "I want you to settle about our little Christmas party; you know we always have one, and I like to keep up our old custom, though it is but in a small way. Florence and I have been talking it

over. Though it is some time to come, it's just as well to arrange things."

This was about the only little piece of gaiety the Veres had in the year; for, as I afterwards discovered, the smallness of their means precluded any frequent entertainment of even the few friends they had; therefore the Christmas festivity was looked forward to for weeks, and many were the contrivances and consultations it gave rise to. We drew our chairs to the fire, and were soon deep in consultation on the subject, for they never seemed to consider my presence any restraint; but all family matters, except that of expenditure, were freely discussed before me.

"Mr. Beverley has offered himself as usual," said Ernest.

"I can't think what he finds here to amuse him so much," said the old lady, with a puzzled expression of countenance.

"Perhaps he intends to ask you to do him the honour of becoming Mrs. Beverley; for I am sure that is how he would word his proposal, if he ever made one."

"Nonsense, Ernest, you really ought not to talk in such a way. Mr. Aylmer will give a pretty account of you to his country friends."

"Pray do not call me Mr. Aylmer, ma'am," said I; "I'm always called Johnny or Jack at home; my father would be horrified if he heard me called Mr."

"Very well, I will call you Johnny now; but I never can remember that you are so young; you

look older than Mr. Davis, and he is twenty-four. But come, we do not get on very fast with our plans," continued the old lady, tapping on her little work-table with her spectacle-case.

"Mr. Beverley number one," said Florence, in her downright practical way; "Crotchet and Quaver make three; then do you intend having Stephen Davis?"

"Stephen?" said I. "Why, his name's Richard, isn't it? You always called him Dick."

"Haven't you heard that story? I must tell it you. Dick stammers sometimes when he's nervous; it's a trick he always had. He was had up at school one day to be examined about something, and the master said, in a quick manner, 'Have you got your grammar with you, sir?' 'No, sir,' said poor Stephen, 'but I brought a dic—dic—dic—dic,' for the poor fellow couldn't say dictionary; so ever since he has gone by the name of Dick Davis."

"Yes, by all means; we'll have poor Davis," said Mrs. Vere; "he must not be allowed to spend a lonely Christmas-day."

"Then, there's Franz Kauffmann," said Ernest; "shall he be allowed to spend a lonely Christmas-day?"

"Well," continued his mother, "I do not like him much, Ernest; he never *does* go to church. Now, Mr. Beverley, and the Frizzles, and young Davis are all proper-behaved, and attend to their religious duties; but I cannot make out what this Kauffmann is."

"But we sha'n't meet till after church, so we're not supposed to know anything about it," replied Ernest. "And then he's very often depressed and lonely, and he has no relations, and he's very poor, and has had a great disappointment, and——"

"Stop, stop, Ernest," said the mother; "any one of those reasons would have been sufficient, except the first, which is a very bad one. If you will undertake to entertain him, I will ask him; for I do not understand his strange talk and high flights, so you must take charge of him entirely. Is there any person you would like to be asked, Florence? It is fair, as you have all the trouble, that you should have a voice in the arrangements."

"No, thank you, dear mother; we shall have quite enough with those five. Why, we shall be eight altogether; how on earth shall we find room for them?"

"Oh, never mind," said placid Mrs. Vere; "we shall manage it somehow, I dare say. Only make them comfortable, and give them enough to eat."

Miss Vere looked as if she thought this would not be a very easy matter, but she said nothing more, and the subject dropped.

"Ernest," said Mrs. Vere, "you had better buy a pack of cards when you go out next; that will help to amuse them."

"Davis hates cards, mother; he was brought up in a very good family."

"Never mind; the Frizzles like them, and Davis needn't play, if he objects."

Christmas-eve came, and with it a large basket

of good things from the farm. Ernest's eyes literally glowed with delight as he helped me to unpack the treasures, which reminded him so much of his former rural life. First came an enormous fat turkey, the pride of the farmyard; then a large cake; and then a cargo of the largest apples our orchard could produce; not to mention other smaller delicacies, in the way of pork-pies and sausages. A fine ham and a tempting piece of bacon were also added to the stores, which were all delivered into the hands of Miss Vere, to be dealt with according to the wants of the household. Florence was thus saved all anxiety as to the quantity and quality of to-morrow's fare, for nothing could be more luxurious than the dainties supplied; and, with the fine piece of beef sent by Mr. Beverley from his little estate in one of the midland counties, we looked forward to the Christmas banquet with feelings of great satisfaction. Both Ernest and I came home early from work that evening, and to Mrs. Vere's amazement I dragged into the house a large quantity of holly I had bought in the street. It was hailed with enthusiasm by Ernest and his sister, and the former was loud in his expressions of delight.

"Why, this is very kind. Nothing could have given me greater pleasure, for I have no spare cash to throw away on trifles like these. How very good you are! It reminds me of the time when we used to stick the holly up in the old hall at home."

I thought of the little holly-wreath which I was certain they were placing on Sophy's grave that evening, and sighed.

"Now, don't look melancholy, John," said Ernest; "this must be very different to your merry Christmas at home, but we will try to make it as pleasant as we can. Cheer up, old fellow; nothing ever mends by looking dismal over it."

"Look, Ernest," said Miss Vere, "is not that Mr. Lombard's carriage passing? No; it's not passing, I declare it's stopping here. What can be the reason of such an unusual proceeding?"

"A note or a message to me from Mr. Lombard, most likely. It can't be anything very interesting," and he moved from the window to the other end of the room.

"Here is a lady getting out," said Florence, who was still at the window; "and I do believe it is Miss Lombard."

"I think I've got some writing to do upstairs," said Ernest, and he moved nervously towards the door.

"Ernest, don't go away," said Mrs. Vere, quickly; and Ernest, like a dutiful son, obeyed the admonition, but looked as if he was about to have an interview with a dentist. I was full of curiosity to see this dreadful person that Ernest seemed so frightened at, and concluded that she must be a feminine likeness of her father, the dreaded head of the firm. What was my astonishment at seeing a gentle, elegant, almost childish-looking girl enter softly, without any announcement, and em-

brace Mrs. Vere in the most affectionate manner, saying,—

"My dear, dear friend, I thought I never was to see you again."

I turned to look at Ernest, and wondered he did not come forward more quickly, but his face was scarlet, and he seemed to be struggling with some suppressed emotion. But he commanded himself at last, and gave her what I thought a rather cold welcome. "How differently I should have spoken to Mary," I thought to myself, "if she had come to pay *my* mother a visit on Christmas-eve." Miss Lombard looked flushed and anxious when Ernest spoke to her, and seemed glad to take refuge in the conversation of Mrs. Vere and her daughter.

"Mamma wished me to come and see you," she said.

"Did you not wish it yourself?" asked Mrs. Vere.

"Of course I did. How can you doubt it; but you know papa——" and here her voice dropped, and the conversation was carried on in low tones. It soon became again general, and Miss Lombard's cheerful silvery laugh added zest to everything she said.

"But I must not forget my mother's presents," she exclaimed at last, opening a basket she held in her hand.

"Here is a knitted shawl for you, Mrs. Vere. Mamma made it all herself," and she put the fine warm lambswool covering over the old lady's shoulders. "She took such pains with it; is it not nicely knitted?"

"Beautifully, my dear; but what I value most is the kind thought that prompted such a gift. Your dear mother's character has never changed since she and I were at school together, when she used to help everybody; and so thoughtful she was too. How I wish I could do something for her in return."

"Pray don't," replied her young friend, "or it will take away from the value of mamma's present. And here, Florence, here is something for you. Mamma thought you would not care so much for her work, so she told me to choose the prettiest inkstand I could find, and here it is." And she held it up with a child's delight.

Florence evinced more pleasure than I had considered her capable of feeling, and gave the pretty speaker a warm embrace. As usual, her words were few, and Miss Lombard turned towards Ernest, who had been sitting all this time without saying a word.

"Mr. Vere, mamma sent her kind regards to you, and she hopes you will accept this book; she said she thought you cared more for books than anything else; and she remembered hearing you say a long time ago, how much you admired the writings of Jeremy Taylor."

Ernest accepted the beautifully bound book with great delight, and begged Miss Lombard to convey his warmest thanks to the kind donor. "Or, perhaps, I had better write a note," he said.

"Not the least necessary," replied she. "I can

take all your messages. It will be pleasant to talk it over in the evening. You know mamma and I have not a great deal to talk about, and papa dines out to-day."

"May I ask you a favour?" said Ernest, in a nervous voice.

"Certainly; what is it?" and Miss Lombard looked almost as much frightened as he did.

"Will you be so good as to write my name in this book?" and he dipped a pen in the ink, and handed it to her.

She complied in silence.

"Thank you; the book will now be treble its former value," he said, in a low, hurried voice. I was close to them, so I could not help hearing what passed.

"Now your own name, if you please; if you have no objection," he continued, in a tremulous voice.

"But why mine? Mamma gave you the book."

"I know, but you brought it. Pray do it; only your own name; up here, if you like, or on the other leaf."

She complied with his request. He murmured a few words, which she answered in as low a tone, and I did not hear what passed. However, she seemed suddenly to recollect something, and said,—

"Good-bye, Mrs. Vere; I must not keep the horses waiting. I am afraid I have been here too long already."

"Good-bye, dear Fanny; come again, if you can; but remember, I have no wish to make matters unpleasant at home."

"I like chestnut hair and blue eyes," said I, as Ernest returned from escorting her to the carriage. "How pretty she is!" Ernest did not answer; but Florence replied,—

"Pretty is not the word for her. She is lovely, fascinating."

"I never knew you so enthusiastic," said the old lady. "The skies will fall." Then turning to me, she continued—"Mrs. Lombard is a very old friend of mine. We used to be very intimate before trouble came upon us; and *she* would always have been the same; but Mr. Lombard is a man who thinks much of what the world says, and he does not approve now of the intimacy, either between us or our children.

"What a wicked old man he must be," said I, with my usual vehemence.

"Not at all. He is a highly respected and influential person, and much thought of in his own set, and he has never done anything unkind to us; but there is a quiet 'I don't want to have much to do with you' implied in his manner, which says as much as if he had desired his family never to come near us. Miss Lombard is rather wilful, and when she wishes to come to us she does it first, and asks leave afterwards, I believe; but it is ages since I saw her last, and I was quite surprised to hear their carriage drive up to the door this evening.

Mrs. Lombard is an invalid, and seldom leaves her own house; and I confess I am too proud to go where I am not sure of a welcome from the husband."

She was silent, and I could not help murmuring again, "How very lovely her daughter is! and she looks so good too. Do you know, Ernest, she is just the person I should like you to marry."

Ernest, who had been in a reverie all the time we were talking, gave a sudden start at this speech, and then relapsed into his former pensive attitude. I thought him very stupid, and was determined to tease him.

"I wonder why you were so cross to her when she first came in," I said, touching him on the shoulder to attract his attention.

"Cross, was I?" Why, I hardly spoke to her."

"That's just it," I answered; "a pretty way to treat a visitor!"

"Never mind him, Ernest," said the sympathizing sister; "he is only teasing you. I wonder whether Mrs. Lombard will be able to go to church to-morrow," she continued, trying to change the conversation, which, for some reason or other, seemed considerably to embarrass Ernest.

"What a church it is, to be sure!" I answered; "a horrid red brick place, just like a town-hall. So different to our pretty little church in the country, with its ivy-covered tower!"

"And yet," said Florence, "I dare say the ugly red brick church is full of interesting and even poetical associations to many people who have never

seen an ivy-covered tower. Their fathers and mothers were buried there; they themselves were married there, probably; and there most likely their children were christened."

"Poor wretches!" said I. "Children of the counting-house and the shop, how I pity them!" I forgot how much, a little time ago, I had pitied the clodhoppers, and envied the denizens of towns.

"Gently, gently," said Ernest. "Don't abuse your neighbours. Please to remember that I am a child of the counting-house."

"Oh, you are quite different. You are a gentleman, and have lived nearly all your life in the country."

"I am not considered one by some people," said Ernest. "Ask Mr. Lombard what he thinks upon the subject."

"I shall not ask him anything at all about it, for I have made up my mind on the subject; and have also made up my mind that chestnut hair and blue eyes form the prettiest combination possible," I added, mischievously.

"If you want to oblige me, you will not joke upon that subject," said Ernest, gravely.

"Upon what subject?" said I, though I perfectly understood what he meant. "Upon the question of your being a gentleman or not?"

"No. Upon anything connected with Miss Lombard."

I saw it would not do to pursue the subject further. Ernest was evidently in love with Miss Lombard, but I thought he had a very odd way of

showing it. They did not talk at all as Mary and I did, that was certain. That night I turned the subject over and over in my mind, but without coming to any conclusion. If she did not like him, I thought, she would not have come there; but perhaps she did not come of her own accord; perhaps her mother sent her. Yet it would be strange indeed, if any one so kind, so generous, so noble-hearted as Ernest Vere should love in vain. Then I thought that the obstacle to their union might be the cruel father, and *his* objection might be Ernest's poverty; and then the question arose, ought I not to write to the rector, and tell him my surmises? But then I knew nothing for certain, and Miss Vere's warning not to interfere returned to my mind. I, who was afraid of nothing, stood, without knowing it, in considerable awe of that quiet, sarcastic, industrious daughter of the house; and I felt that I would give a good deal to secure her good opinion, or even to escape her censure. I resolved to let matters rest for the present, and to see what turn events would take, before I meddled.

CHAPTER V.

A CHRISTMAS PARTY.

CHRISTMAS morning was fresh and clear. How the icicles must have glittered on the hedges at home! But here they were trampled down by the hurrying crowd, and lost in the mud of an early thaw. It did not feel like Christmas to me, though the Veres did their best to make it so; and their good wishes were given with a heartiness which could not have been surpassed by any of my own family. We went to morning service. The Lombards were there; and though I had not observed them before, I easily made them out from Mrs. Vere's description. Mr. Lombard was a tall, pompous-looking man, with a bald head and iron-grey whiskers; his countenance was immovable, and utterly devoid of expression, excepting towards the mouth, which was marked by very peculiar lines, apparently furrowed by the ploughshare of care. There was also one deep line across his forehead, which gave a severe, hard appearance to the face, which looked as if it had been cut out of wood; and, when I saw him, I mentally exclaimed, "Poor Mrs. Lombard! poor Fanny! poor Ernest!" I am afraid my thoughts were much taken up during service by speculations concerning the

future lives of the two latter; but I delighted in having materials for an interesting romance, and could not resist the pleasure of weaving them into shape. Mrs. Lombard seemed to be a pale, quiet person, with a sweet expression and a languid manner; and as for her daughter, neither poet's pen nor artist's pencil could do justice to the soft luxuriance of that chestnut hair, and the gentle light of those clear blue eyes. I had not been confirmed, so left the church after the sermon; but instead of going home I walked up and down quickly, till the others came out; for my curiosity was aroused, and I was anxious to see the greeting of the Lombards and the Veres—the Montagues and Capulets of my imagination. I might have seen the meeting several times before, as both families attended the same church on Sundays; but I had not then the same interest in watching it, and Miss Lombard always kept her veil down when she came out of church. They came out at the same door. I remarked Mrs. Vere and her daughter shook hands warmly with Mrs. and Miss Lombard, as also did Ernest; but Mr. Lombard merely lifted his hat, and passed on, waiting impatiently by the side of a wheeled chair, as if to give a hint to his wife to cut short the numerous questions and answers which were rapidly interchanged. His behaviour bordered on rudeness; but it was well-bred rudeness, at which no one could take open offence. The ladies were obliged to separate sooner than they wished, and Mrs. Lombard, supported by her daughter, got into the chair and was

soon wheeled away. When we got home we found Mr. Beverley had already arrived, and loud and hearty was his Christmas greeting. He had brought presents in his pockets too: a handsome fan for Mrs. Vere (I thought this very like his contradictory nature, for the weather was severely cold); a seal-ring for Ernest; and, to my surprise, a neat case of mathematical instruments for me. With some hesitation he next presented Florence with a leathern case, and begged her not to open it until the next day. But she in her calm manner disobeyed his injunction, and displayed to our astonished gaze a magnificent set of rubies. This accounted for his request; he was afraid she would refuse the gorgeous gift. "Really, Mr. Beverley," she said, "you must excuse my taking this. I fully appreciate your kindness; but I never go into society, and therefore should not have the opportunity of displaying these jewels."

"I don't want you to display them, my dear" (Mr. Beverley always called her, my dear); "I only want you to keep them for my sake: think of me as your godfather; I dare say I was, only I have forgotten it."

It was unanimously decided that Florence was to accept them, for no one could dream of hurting the old gentleman's feelings by refusing his present, though it was certainly an unsuitable one for a person in her position. Had Miss Vere been about to marry a peer, she could hardly have received a more costly wedding gift.

Mr. Beverley laughed when he saw the astonish-

ment his munificence occasioned. "You know, my dear," he said, "if you ever get very poor, and I am dead and cannot help you, you can sell these jewels or pawn them, and that would help you a little," and his eyes twinkled as if he did not mean a word he said. He had a very droll look sometimes, and seemed able to find a joke where no one else could. He was not at all in a contradictory humour this day, and sat by Mrs. Vere, engaged in lively conversation, whilst Florence superintended the household arrangements. I remarked he was always far gentler in his manner towards the female sex. I watched them sitting side by side; he so earnest and so gallant, looking almost young in his eagerness to catch every word that fell from her lips; she so calm and composed in her manner, and yet evidently so much interested in the topics they were discussing; I thought it would not be strange if these two should indeed wish to spend the remainder of their lives together, and Ernest's words did not seem so foolish to me as they had appeared to his mother. But then I looked at her widow's cap, her deep mourning, and the traces of suffering in that pale, gentle face, and I felt that she was one who could never forget the past, or bury it in a second love. My reverie was cut short by the arrival of the other guests, who came almost simultaneously. The meek, quiet little Davis, who appeared ill at ease even in this small party; the tall, gaunt Franz Kauffmann, who looked as if he had been up all night battling with evil spirits, so wild were his eyes and so excited his

manner; and the two Misses Frizzle, the eldest of whom looked quaint, and the youngest frightened. The greetings of the two last were exuberant; those of the artist were given as if he had been a somnambulist surprised in one of his nightly peregrinations; and Davis shook hands with us all in turn, but was too shy to make an audible remark. Things did not look promising until Mr. Beverley broke into the circle, and with fine tact and great good-nature abandoned his interesting conversation with the old lady, in order to set the rest of the company at their ease. When Florence returned, the restraint wore off, for the presence of numbers seemed to shake her out of her usual reserve; and when she took the trouble, no one shone more in conversation. Mr. Beverley's animation was increased tenfold by her presence, and we were soon a lively party, Kauffmann excepted, who sat by himself, gloomy and abstracted. I longed to fathom his thoughts, and took a chair close by him, though I little expected he would notice such a mere youth. But he turned at my approach, and said,—

"Young man, are you studying art?"

"No, sir, I am learning navigation."

"That's a pity. You have eyes like an artist's eyes; they can flash, they can burn. I have been watching you ever since I came into this room. Your head is formed differently to that of any other person present. The bones over the eyes are full and large—they possess the true artistic curve; young man, you have mistaken your voca-

tion." I thought this very likely; my life seemed destined to be full of mistakes. But I made no answer, and he continued,—"You will not have a happy life, no one with those eyes can. You will be the prey of ungratified ambition. It may be in love, it may be in the desire of fame that you will find your suffering; but suffer you must, sooner or later, and you will suffer terribly." Then seeing my look of dismay, he changed his tone to a gentler key. "It is the penalty which those of finer organization must pay. We cannot expect to pass through life like ordinary mortals; and who would exchange our capacity of feeling for the dull, tame existence which most men call life?"

"What are you frightening young Aylmer about?" said Florence, interrupting our talk. "Come, Mr. Kauffmann, dinner is waiting."

"Madam," replied the artist, "I was merely instructing our young friend in the laws of the eternal organization of the soul, as it affects the temporary organization of the body."

I thought Miss Vere said something to herself, which sounded very like "stuff," but she was too polite to express her feelings aloud, and succeeded in enticing our unmanageable friend down to dinner.

The culinary efforts of Miss Vere and the little maid were successful beyond all desires. The large turkey from Oakwood was done full justice to, and Mr. Beverley's beef came in for an ample share of admiration. Some of the guests looked as if this luxurious repast were indeed a feast to

them, and it was enjoyed in a manner of which those who fare sumptuously every day can form no conception. I found myself seated next Mr. Kauffmann; but he had for the present entirely forgotten spiritual organization, and was completely absorbed in his care for the bodily. When we had satisfied our hunger, conversation reigned supreme, and many a jest flew round the table.

"Mr. Vere," said Crotchet, "we drank tea at Mrs. Peepanpry's last night, and who do you think we talked about?"

"Indeed I can't say, Miss Frizzle."

"Well, we talked about——"

"Now, my dear Felicia," interrupted Quaver, in a trembling voice, "I really would advise you not to repeat things. You know what a scrape you got into about that report you set going concerning Sir Matthew Stock; you really ought to take care; I live in constant dread of being had up before somebody for a libel."

"Nonsense, my dear Agatha," replied the stronger-minded sister; "you're always in constant dread of something; for my part, I wonder you have not died of fright long ago, what with thieves, and fires, and lawsuits, and other things that exist only in your own imagination. But to go on with what I was saying, Mr. Vere; we talked about you."

"Indeed! I am highly honoured. And, may I ask, what induced you to make such an unworthy individual the subject of your conversation?"

"Yes, certainly. Some one there was talking

of Fanny Lombard (I saw Ernest's face flush deeply at this name), and saying that her father wanted her to marry old Chowse, of the Stock Exchange; who, they say, has more money than he knows what to do with. Well, Fanny will not hear of it; and some people say that there is another lover in the case, and some people even go so far as to say, that the other lover is yourself, Mr. Vere. Then it was very natural that *you* should come under discussion; and it was debated whether you had already proposed and been rejected by the father, or whether it was only coming on."

"What coming on?" asked Ernest, evidently disposed to be more angry than I had ever seen him.

"Why, the *affair*, of course; you know what I mean."

"Miss Frizzle," said Ernest, apparently having entirely conquered his momentary ill-humour, "you are a very old friend of mine, and I will beg you to do me a favour."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," was the eager reply. Miss Frizzle evidently expected to be a go-between in the love affair.

"Well, it is this—Never to couple my name with that of any young lady. You do not know what harm you may do me, without the least intending it. I beg you to excuse my rudeness in saying this, for I would not offend you for the world. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to propose a toast. A merry Christmas and a happy New Year to us all, and a health to all absent friends!"

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm; and the

subject was happily turned, without having given offence to anybody. I could not sufficiently admire Ernest's tact and self-command.

There were two or three defaulters from the evening service. First, Mrs. Vere failed, being fatigued with the duties of the morning; then Franz Kauffmann did not seem ever to have had the slightest intention of going; and the two musical old ladies professed themselves too delicate to encounter the raw twilight. I also stayed at home, being anxious to improve my acquaintance with the melancholy artist, whom I regarded with a kind of religious awe, as if he really had the power of seeing into the future. Ernest and Davis, Miss Vere and Mr. Beverley, departed to their religious duties at the sound of the evening bell, and we remained chatting round the fire. Crotchet and Quaver devoted themselves to Mrs. Vere, and sitting one on each side of her, plied her unremittingly with questions. Kauffmann devoted himself to me, and never did I pass a more entertaining hour. He was full of stories about his former artist life in Germany, which he described with a wild enthusiasm that delighted me. Then he discussed the prospects of art in England, and bemoaned the lamentable bad taste of the age; coming at last to the eternal subject of his thoughts, his own great picture, which would be painted when some great patron of art should arise and give him a liberal order. Then he rambled off into the history of other painters; their trials and difficulties, their feuds and their hatreds, their

quarrels and poisonings, in the days of the old Italian schools; and ended with a half-insane metaphysical discussion, in which even I could perceive he got completely out of his depth. He was evidently no Christian; but I could not ascertain whether he had any particular theory or system; he seemed to be partly an atheist, and partly a pantheist; but he contradicted himself so often, that I could not make out what he was. I was sorry when the rest of the party came back, and we were obliged to return to commonplace topics of conversation. Tea was then provided, and that meal passed off without any injudicious subjects being introduced by Crotchet and Quaver; and afterwards cards were introduced, and a round game set going, which was joined by all the company, Davis excepted, who refused on principle, and quietly enjoyed himself by the fire with a book. Before ten, all the guests had departed. Mr. Beverley was the last to take leave, and even then seemed unwilling to go.

"Well, our grand Christmas party is over," said the old lady, with a smile of satisfaction, soon followed by a yawn. "And I think, Ernest, it went off very well indeed."

"I think Franz Kauffmann is madder than ever," said her daughter. "Did you hear the nonsense he was talking to John Aylmer about his fate and destiny, and all kinds of rubbish? Why can't the man go to church, and behave like other people?"

"He would tell you that he is of a different

organization to us all," said Ernest, smiling. "For my part, I think a man of genius is less excusable than others, if he does not do his duty; but people differ, and some will tell you that great talent absolves its possessor from all obligations, human and divine. It may be very bad taste, but do you know I infinitely prefer that insignificant-looking Davis for a companion? Kauffmann is brilliant and amusing, but there is no dependence to be placed on him; whilst Davis says little, but is firm as a rock in all matters of principle."

"Give me Kauffmann," said I; "there is some excitement in talking to him."

"Or rather in hearing *him* talk," said Mrs. Vere. "*You* did not say much; for I was watching you both, and he went on talking so fast, that you had no opportunity of saying yes or no."

"Just like Franz," replied her son; "he delights in getting a new listener. He likes soliloquizing aloud, but all the time he is not thinking the least of his auditor, only of his own fancies. I often fancy he must sometimes talk himself to sleep. The sound of his voice is like a running brook in the summer time."

"So it is," replied I; "and he is a very charming person. I only wish I could be like him."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATE OF A GENIUS.

WINTER passed away, and spring returned with all its freshness and beauty. What would I not have given at that time for a ramble in those fields I had once despised! My heart had grown quite weary with living so many months in the huge dark city, and I envied the sparrows that flew about over the chimney-pots, because I felt that they had the power at least of sometimes seeing green pastures, —"green pastures and waters of comfort." I felt all the meaning of those words now, when I heard them read in church, and the twenty-third Psalm was the only one I cared for. I poured out my feelings to Ernest, who sympathized with me entirely; but the only recipe he gave me for dissipating my regrets was, "Shut your eyes, and think of fresh roses." Ernest was wonderfully patient, though he had a deep-rooted and longing love for the country quite different to my spasmodic and changeable affection. I discovered that he went without his dinner several times, in order to bring home to Florence a bunch of the flowers she loved, lilies of the valley, or early roses, which were selling in the streets. She never discovered the self-inflicted privation, but received them with a gentle

reprimand on his extravagance, which he took in good part. The days flew rapidly by; for our occupations were the same, week after week, and there were no startling events to mark the time. My greatest pleasures were receiving letters from home or from Mary. From these I perceived that the intimacy between my father and Captain Dashwood was increasing, and they seemed to spend almost every evening in each other's society. Beauty, too, was often at the farm, and the letters were generally concluded with an affectionate message from him. Merton I seldom saw, except in school hours, and then not regularly, for his habits of study were shortlived, and he seemed to spend his days chiefly in amusement. I did not regret this, as I once thought I should do, for my fancy was engrossed in watching the feelings and actions of those with whom I lived. I was anxious, too, about Ernest; he did not look well, and grew thinner and paler every day. Since the rebuff given to the talkative Crotchet, none of us had mentioned the name of pretty Fanny Lombard, and I could not ascertain whether Ernest had seen her since that memorable Christmas Eve when she burst upon us like a vision of youth and joy. Things seemed to be growing dull in the once cheerful little home; Miss Vere's face grew more severe every day, and I thought the old lady's saintlike serenity rather provoking. I was beginning to wish almost that the house might fall in, in order to cause a change in our monotonous routine, when an event, that created no less asto-

nishment than horror, occurred. One day I was returning from Capstan's, and on my way home I met Ernest, with something of trouble in his usually cheerful face. I asked him what was the matter, and he replied by taking hold of my arm and walking me off to a little street less frequented than the others.

"Here we can pace up and down," he said, "without interruption, and I want to consult you before we go further."

"What is it?" I eagerly asked, hoping things had come to a crisis in "*the affair*," as Miss Crotchet called it.

"It's about that poor painter, Kauffmann. I've been to see him, and found him in such a state of excitement, it would quite frighten you to be with him. He is walking up and down his studio, raving because he has had another disappointment about his picture; somebody was going to give him an order for it, and didn't, or something of that sort; at any rate, he's in a dreadful state about it, and I don't know what will be the consequence if nothing can be done. He really is not fit to take care of himself; I think he must be a madman,—and yet how beautiful that picture is! What I want to talk to you about is this: Do you think it would be of any use to ask Mr. Beverley if he would do it?"

Ernest was rather incoherent. He seemed frightened and hurried.

"You know best," I said. "You have known him longer than I have. I think he would do anything you asked him, he is so very fond of you."

"Then we'll go together and ask him."

Ernest would never have asked a favour of Mr. Beverley, if he had known what I knew afterwards.

We walked fast, and soon reached the old gentleman's abode.

"Mr. Beverley at home?" asked Ernest of the grave individual in black, who opened the door.

"Yes, sir; but he is at supper, and must not be disturbed."

"Tell him Mr. Vere wishes to see him on business of the utmost importance," was the vehement reply.

The servant departed on his errand with a face expressive of deep wonderment that any one knowing his master's habits should presume to intrude at such a moment. Instead of his returning, Mr. Beverley himself came to the door, apparently quite alarmed at the message, and begged us to follow him upstairs immediately.

When we were seated, Ernest gave him an account of Kauffmann; his ideas, his prospects, his temperament, and the fearful state of mind he was apt to get into when his projects were thwarted. He gave him a glowing account of the picture; described the design in eloquent terms, and begged Mr. Beverley to come and see it.

"I don't care much about pictures, my dear boy," was the reply to this harangue; "but what do you want me to do?"

"To order it," said Ernest.

"What will it cost?"

"Nine hundred pounds."

Mr. Beverley sat down at his desk, wrote a cheque, and handed it to Ernest.

"But, my dear sir, you need not pay for it until you get it," said Ernest, looking at the cheque in astonishment, and quite amazed that his request should be so quickly granted.

"Never mind. Take it, and do what you like with it. I would do a great deal more for—for——" The old gentleman seemed unable to finish his sentence.

"My dear, dear sir, you don't know how much good you are doing; perhaps saving a soul from ruin. But it is only just what I should have expected from you; it is like yourself, always good and generous. How can I ever thank you enough?"

"Don't thank me at all, Ernest; I am nothing but a selfish old brute, after all. Be a good boy, and don't cry, now you have got it all your own way," for Ernest's eyes were filling with tears of joy at the success of his petition.

"Now, Johnny," said Ernest, as the door of the dingy old mansion was shut behind us, "is not that dear old man the kindest and best of human beings?"

I assented, enthusiastically; and begged Ernest to let me look at the cheque, for I had never seen an order for so much money before.

"Make haste and look at it then," he replied, "for we must hurry on, and perhaps now we shall not be in time."

"In time for what? Do you apprehend anything particular?"

"I don't know what I apprehend. Rather a horrible feeling has come over me about Kauffmann, and he is all alone in the house now. Do you remember what he told us about trying to shoot himself once?"

"Yes, I do;" and my blood ran cold as I spoke the words. "Did you tell him you were going to ask Mr. Beverley?"

"No. I was afraid of raising his hopes. I had no right to say what Mr. Beverley might or might not do."

"Did he seem in a very distracted state?"

"Yes; he was raging about the room with an open letter in his hand, and calling the person who wrote it all kinds of names. He wanted to burn his cartoon, but I would not let him. Oh, Johnny, I thank Heaven every day that I am not a genius; when I see what they go through, I think I would almost rather be a fool!"

"Nonsense," said I; "it is only because they don't keep their passions and feelings under proper control."

How harsh and rash are the judgments of youth! I, who was destined to fall into the same snare, was merciless to the faults of others.

"Do not judge hardly," said Ernest; "you don't know what temptations you may undergo yourself some day."

We hurried on breathlessly.

"Thank goodness there's the house at last," said Ernest; "and the door, too, is open. Franz's careless habits have stood us for once in good stead."

Now that we had reached the house, we felt almost afraid to go in. A nameless fear possessed us, which we did not communicate to each other, but I saw it in the eager eyes of Ernest, and felt it in the trembling pressure of his hand.

"Oh, if I had felt then what I feel now," he said, speaking softly, as if afraid of frightening some one, "I never, never would have left him alone."

"Pooh, nonsense!" I replied, trying to conceal my fears. "He's safe enough, I promise you. Men are not such fools as to kill themselves for a disappointment. Come along."

And I ran up the stairs that led to the studio. The house was a large one, and Franz only inhabited a part of it. A dead silence reigned in the precincts, for the other inhabitants had not yet returned from their daily avocations, and even the women who took care of the place were absent. I stopped as I reached the door of the studio.

"Stay a minute, Ernest," I said, changing my intention of entering quickly. "Let's go down, and look for somebody first. Kauffmann may be gone out. The door feels as if it were locked." It was not locked, but my fingers were so weak, I could not turn the handle.

"How foolish we are!" said Ernest, trying the door.

It opened quickly and easily; but oh, the sight that met our eyes! I have suffered much and terribly since, but the agony of that moment is still before me with a horror of its own, distinct

and particular. Franz was lying on the floor, shot through the heart. A pistol lay beside him. His beautiful design, illuminated by the rays of the evening sun, looked down upon him as if in silent mockery of all his hopes and dreams; and the easel, at which he had so often worked out the mental pictures that set his brain on fire, had fallen on the floor, in sign that its master would paint there no more. We raised the lifeless body, and placed it on the bed in the inner room, and laid the pistol by its side. Ernest sobbed bitterly as he moved the body of his friend; but as for me, I was too horror-struck to give way to any emotion. I felt turned to stone. It was the first corpse I had seen that did not look as if the spirit had gone to rest. By this time some of the people of the house had returned, and after giving our names and an account of the position in which we had found poor Franz, we left them to take the steps necessary in such a matter, and sorrowfully departed.

"We must go back to Mr. Beverley, and tell him what has happened," said Ernest, in a choking voice. And we went on our way in silence. After a time, Ernest broke out into a bitter lamentation over his stupidity in leaving Franz alone, or, at any rate, not telling him of his intentions. "But I was afraid of kindling hopes that might never be realized. Oh, Johnny, if we had only been quicker!"

"We were as quick as we possibly could be. How we hurried! Mr. Beverley must have thought

us mad as it was. Besides, you do not know when the shot was fired. It happened, perhaps, directly you got out of the house."

"I ought never to have left him," said Ernest. "I might have guessed what would occur. He was quite violent whilst I was with him."

"It is perhaps a providential thing that you *did* leave him. He might have killed you as well as himself." And in this kind of talk—he full of regrets and self-accusations, I full of excuses and palliations—we spent the time that it took us to walk from the unfortunate artist's studio to Bloomsbury-square.

Mr. Beverley was astonished to see us back again, and still more astonished at our pale and horror-stricken faces.

"Boys, boys," he said, when we had told him all, "you ought to have come to me before. I am a rough-spoken old man, but I would never refuse help to those who need it. Oh dear! oh dear! if I had only known poor Kauffmann's wishes yesterday!"

"I doubt if it would have been of any real use," I replied, seeing what an agony of remorse this unfortunate speech had occasioned poor Ernest. "His was not a disposition that would have been contented anyhow. If he had gained one thing, he would have begun to want something else."

"You had better go home, Ernest, and keep quiet," said Mr. Beverley. "Take care of him, John; he is over-worked and over-excited. Take great care of him; and whatever you do, take care not to

alarm the ladies. Better not tell them, perhaps, at all."

"They will see it in his face, sir."

"To be sure—to be sure, poor things! But they will be so shocked! Don't tell them he killed himself, only tell them he is dead."

"It can't be kept from them, sir, I'm afraid; people will be sure to talk of it before them. Besides, I suppose we shall be wanted at the inquest."

The old gentleman shook his head. He saw it was in vain to attempt to conceal the matter. I thought it curious that he should seem more anxious to prevent Mrs. and Miss Vere suffering from the dreadful news, than appalled or grieved at the event itself.

"Poor Kauffmann! If he had only waited half an hour! But I was always afraid he would go out of his senses some day. Miss Florence knew him so well, I wonder how she will bear it. It is a terrible thing to lose one's friends in such a manner." And so the old gentleman went on, whilst Ernest leant against a chair, quite exhausted with the emotions he had undergone.

There was nothing further to be said, so we went home, leaving the cheque behind us. A very sad evening we all spent. We sat without speaking of anything but the all-engrossing, mournful subject; and Ernest had to relate his last interview with poor Franz over and over again. Poor Mrs. Vere was very much affected, and cried bitterly. Florence did not shed a tear, but went to bed early with a bad headache. I thought she wished to

hide her emotion from us. It was quite natural that they should feel Kauffmann's death deeply, for they had known him long, and had become interested in his pursuits, and attracted by his strange character.

Ernest and I had to attend the inquest. He was much affected, but gave his evidence clearly and to the point. The verdict was returned, "Suicide during temporary insanity." The affair was talked about for a few days, and then forgotten by all except ourselves; but in our small household it was destined to make a lasting impression. As the summer advanced, the weather grew intensely hot, and I could perceive that it was with the greatest difficulty Ernest could fulfil his daily duties at Mr. Lombard's office. He was also suffering from some deep mental distress, but whether caused by his love for the beautiful Fanny, or from an idea that he was partly the cause of Franz Kauffmann's death, I could not ascertain. The latter event evidently preyed upon his mind; and he never could get rid of the impression, that if he had acted more wisely, it would not have happened. He kept saying, over and over again, that if he had stayed with him, things would have turned out differently; and time, instead of removing the impression, only increased it. One day, when I returned from my work—which grew more irksome to me than ever, now that the weather was so fine, and the long bright sunny afternoons reminded me of my woody rambles and unrestrained reveries—I was astonished not to find any

one in the room where the family usually spent their evenings. I waited for some time, but a dead silence reigned, and I was on the point of ringing for the servant, and inquiring whether any unusual event had occurred, when Florence entered with tearful eyes.

"What has happened? Is your mother ill?" I inquired, anxiously.

"No. Ernest returned from work earlier than usual very unwell. He is suffering very much pain in his head and side. I have sent for the doctor, and my mother is nursing him. Do not alarm yourself; it may pass off to-morrow."

But I saw from her manner that she did not anticipate any such favourable termination to her anxiety.

"Let me go up and see him," I begged. "Pray let me go and see him."

"No; I beg you will not. Excitement cannot be good for him. He is very feverish, and must be kept quiet. Pray stay here, and let me know directly the doctor comes."

And she left the room. Poor Ernest! At last he had given way! Oh, why had I not written to the rector? But after all, this was only illness, and not a money trouble; and what would Miss Vere say, if I interfered?

The doctor came, and pronounced the illness to be caused by over-fatigue and excitement of mind. He said that if he could ensure perfect rest for a few days, he felt sanguine concerning Ernest's recovery; but that the least anxiety would do him

great injury. He prescribed cooling draughts and great watchfulness on the part of those who tended him, and then left, promising to return early the next day. Florence sat up all night, and in the morning gave me a better account. She said Ernest was less feverish, but very weak, and would be unable to go to his work for some time. She advised me to go to Capstan's as usual, and said that perhaps when I came back Ernest would like to see me. I ventured to say,—

"Would it not be advisable to write to the rector?"

"Oh no!" said Miss Vere; "it would only alarm the good old man. We'll write presently, when he gets better. He is not equal to travelling, and has not been out of his parish for years, and an alarming letter would be sure to bring him to town directly. You may read this, if you like; it is a letter I received from him yesterday. You see he inquires after you."

This was a greater proof of confidence than I had ever received from Miss Vere, and I was proportionably astonished. The letter was worthy of the kind old friend who had written it; and I was more and more astonished that the Veres could not prevail upon themselves to accept the home the good man had so freely offered them. But it was not for me to express my sentiments—I could only wonder in silence; but I absolved Ernest, and accused his sister of sacrificing to a mistaken pride the best prospects of her relations. Thoughts of what was happening at home often intruded on my day's work, and I acquitted myself still less

than usual to the satisfaction of old Matthew Capstan. Merton was there, and plied me with questions about Vere's affairs, and offered to come home with me and see him; but I did not think his presence would be very conducive to the satisfaction of my friends; so I declined his offer, giving as a reason the doctor's desire that he should not be subjected to any excitement.

When I returned, I found Miss Vere downstairs.

"Ernest wishes to see you, but pray go up very gently. Mamma is with him now, but I know he would like to speak to you alone."

I went up and found Mrs. Vere sitting by her son's bedside. Ernest looked very pale, and was lying back quite exhausted. He appeared as if he had gone through weeks of illness. Mrs. Vere went away, and left me alone with him, giving me first a sign to be very quiet.

"Well, old fellow, a pretty state I'm reduced to. I thought it would come at last," said he, in a weak voice, and trying to laugh.

"Why did you not take it in time, then?"

"Because I was afraid of alarming my mother; and even now I don't want her to know what I want to talk to you about. Put your ear close to me, for I can't talk loud."

I did as he directed, and he continued,—

"You must know that it is very important to us that I should continue in my present situation; for I do not very well know where to find another of the same sort; and if I did, it would occasion

great loss of time. I have not strength to write to Mr. Lombard now; Florence might, certainly; but it would be better to do the business by word of mouth. Now, would you go this evening to Mr. Lombard, and tell him exactly the state I am in, and ask him not to dispose of my situation directly, but to accept of a substitute for a few days, which I will provide? Take care what you say, for there are reasons which might make Mr. Lombard glad of a pretext to get rid of me. He has tried to do so once before, but could find no good excuse."

"I will go, certainly," I replied; "and will do my best."

"I am not at all sanguine, remember," said Ernest, turning himself uneasily; "but you have the gift of the gab, and will be sure to put the matter in the best light possible. Mind you come up here directly you come back."

I started cheerily for Mr. Lombard's, feeling great confidence in my powers, and certain that I should be able to move the stony heart of the head of the firm; but as I drew nearer his abode, my courage began to fail; and when I stood on the door-step, it had sunk to a very low ebb indeed.

In reply to my inquiries, I was told that Mr. Lombard was at home, but at dinner. I sent in a pressing request to be allowed to speak to him, if only for a moment. The answer was favourable, and I was shown into a handsome and luxurious dining-room, where three people were sitting.

Dessert was on the table; at the bottom of which sat Mr. Lombard, peeling an orange. His wife, looking weak and languid, occupied the head of the table; and at her right hand, near the fire, was seated the object of Ernest's devotion, playing with a lap-dog. Not one of the party looked sorry at the intrusion of a stranger; their domestic happiness was growing rather flat, or had received some interruption just before I entered.

Miss Lombard bowed, and looked as if she would have shaken hands, had it not been for the presence of her father. Mr. Lombard motioned me to a chair at a little distance from the table, and said, haughtily,—

"Well, young man, what is your business, pray?"

I opened it as quickly as I could, but I felt nervous almost beyond endurance. I described the cause that had led to Ernest's prostration, namely, his anxiety and horror on Kauffmann's account; gave a vivid description of the dreadful scene in the painter's room, at which the ladies shuddered, but Mr. Lombard betrayed no emotion, beyond interrupting me with, "Yes, my good young sir, we read all that in the papers;" and concluded by begging the head of the firm to allow Ernest time to get well, and to ease his mind by sending him a message to that effect. He held up his glass of wine to the light, and sipped it several times before giving me an answer. I was so provoked by his coolness, that I would have given worlds to have launched forth into an expression of my true

opinion concerning his conduct, but Miss Lombard's face of anxiety reminded me of the necessity of self-control.

"So, because Ernest Vere has made himself ill by looking after insane painters," at last replied the man of money, slowly and pompously, "I am to keep a clerkship vacant for him, and lose several weeks' work. A modest request, surely!"

"But he will try and find you a substitute, sir, during the time he is ill," I replied, nearly boiling over with excitement.

"All fudge!" said Mr. Lombard. "I know what those promises are."

"Ernest never broke his word in his life, sir," I cried, vehemently.

"Give the poor young man time, Daniel," said Mrs. Lombard, faintly. "I dare say he'll soon get well," and she made a sign to her daughter, who slipped out of the room.

"Hold your tongue, ma'am," said the head of the firm. "What do you know about business? and this is only a matter of business."

"A matter of business?" cried I; "a matter of Christian charity, I should have thought. But I have often heard that rich people are not Christians, and now I believe it."

"Do you dare to bandy words with me, sir?" said Mr. Lombard, his sallow face turning green with rage. "Go out of my house, and never presume to come into it again; and tell your plausible, sneaking young scoundrel of a friend, that his place will be filled up to-morrow."

It was all over. My intemperate words had brought the matter to a melancholy conclusion. Oh, if Ernest had only intrusted the mission to some one cooler and more experienced than myself! In vain I tried to explain away what I had said; in vain Mrs. Lombard pleaded for me. Mr. Lombard would not hear another word; and I went out of the room crestfallen and miserable, conscious of having ruined the cause of my friend, and wretched at having to return home with the worst news I could possibly bring. As I passed through the entrance-hall, Miss Lombard was standing there with a basket in her hand.

"Is he so very ill?" she asked, in a soft voice, as if afraid of being overheard.

"Very ill indeed."

"Tell him mamma is very sorry for him, and sends him this," she said, giving me the basket. "There is jelly inside it, and other things we thought he would like. You wont mind carrying it?"

"Oh, no! how kind you are! but will you not send a message from yourself? Ernest would be so glad."

This was exceeding the limits of my commission, but I could not resist the temptation.

"Tell him I am very sorry he is ill; there is no harm in that, at any rate," she continued, speaking to herself.

"I will, and thank you much."

I left the house in a very curious state of mind. Horror at the failure of my mission, and joy at

having obtained a message for Ernest from his lady-love, divided my heart between them. What was to be done next? I decided to go to Bloomsbury-square, and ask Mr. Beverley's advice before I returned to Ernest. He might know of another situation that would suit him, or might be able to procure something better even than what he had lost; at any rate, he would be sorry for Ernest, and would condole with me. It was impossible to carry back nothing but bad news to my invalid friend, so I started off as hard as I could in quest of comfort. The door was opened, *not* by the solemn individual in black, but by a maid-servant, who, in answer to my questions, informed me that her master had gone out of town the day before yesterday, and had left no directions for letters or papers to be forwarded to him. This was not an unusual proceeding on his part, but my heart sank as I heard the news.

"When is he expected home again?"

"Can't tell, sir; not under a fortnight, I believe."

Despair possessed me as I turned homewards. The only other acquaintances I had were Stephen Davis, and Crotchet and Quaker. They would be very sorry, but could be of no use in such an emergency; besides, I was not sure that Ernest would like to have his affairs talked over, and I was certain Miss Vere would have a strong objection. So I went to no one, but wearily and despondingly plodded on my way back, and entered Ernest's room, much puzzled how I was to soften the melancholy intelligence.

"What news?" he cried, eagerly. "Bad; I see it in your face."

"Bad, indeed," I replied; "and I fear through my own fault. A few hasty words from me finished the business with that cold, calculating villain."

"Hush," said Ernest; "don't call names. Please tell me exactly all about it."

I gave him a full and particular account of my interview with the head of the firm, and also my private meeting with Miss Lombard, not telling him that I had suggested her message.

"Bless her kind heart for that," he said, quite brightening up at the intelligence,—and in the pleasure of receiving that message, he forgot for a little while his misfortunes. But he was obliged to return to the unpleasant subject. At last a bright idea seemed to strike him.

"Suppose we send or write to Mr. Beverley, and ask if he knows of anything that would suit me."

"Alas!" I replied; "I went there just now; but he has gone out of town, no one knows where."

Ernest continued,—

"It is of no use concealing the affair any longer from you. I am deeply and hopelessly attached to Miss Lombard."

"I suspected as much," I replied. "But how did you manage to become so well acquainted with her when you see her so seldom?"

"Things used to be very different. When I first got my situation, which was given me in consideration of the old friendship subsisting between

my mother and Mrs. Lombard, I was occasionally asked to dinner, and allowed to visit the house whenever I pleased. The intimacy between Miss Lombard and myself began almost unconsciously; and without any previous design on either part, we found ourselves continually talking and reading together. In the course of time, Mr. Lombard's manner changed; he became as cold and haughty towards me as he was to the other clerks, and I found my situation grow proportionately disagreeable. One evening Mr. Lombard called me into his private room, and began a long harangue. He said he had perceived my attentions to his daughter, and that he could by no means encourage them. I must be aware, he continued, of the great disparity between our fortunes and positions; and if I wished to retain my situation I must discontinue visiting his house; and if I did not choose to accede to his terms I had better seek another. To be near her was something, however, and I could not prevail upon myself to throw up the place, as some people would have done. I could not help thinking, though, that what he had said about the disparity of our positions was not quite applicable; for though he was the head of the firm, and I only a poor clerk, yet the Veres have lived in ——shire ever since the time of Henry the Second, and I can trace my ancestry through them all, and a great deal further back than that, too, whilst *his* father was a pedler."

"Did you tell him that?"

"No; of course not. I was neither going to

boast of my ancestry, nor to reproach him with his. It is no glory to me, and no disgrace to him; but when you come to talk of position—— but I will not speak of that any more. Perhaps he meant pecuniary position, and there certainly he beats me; but I hoped some day, by steady industry, to realize sufficient to marry upon. The happy dream of my youth seems now to be over, for I cannot see my way at all."

"Did Miss Vere suffer as much as yourself from the separation?"

"I had no means of ascertaining her feelings. We have met very seldom since. I hear rumours sometimes like that we heard on Christmas-day from that heedless Crotchet, but I believe they are unfounded. The report about old Chowse does not the least alarm me. She is not a person to marry for money; her character is far too pure and exalted."

"And what course do you propose taking now?"

"I must lie quietly here, I suppose, until I get well, and then I shall get Davis to help to look out for another situation."

At this moment Florence came in, and reprimanded me for letting Ernest talk so much. She was much distressed at hearing the bad news I had brought, but did not reproach me for the clumsy manner in which I had fulfilled my mission. I gave her the basket Miss Lombard had put into my hands, but she scrupled much at taking anything that came from her father's house.

"It is a present from Mrs. Lombard," I said; "and surely you cannot refuse that. It would be most uncivil and ungracious."

Ernest agreed with me, and his sister's pride was overruled. Generally, she had her own way in everything, but in this matter Ernest was decided. I saw he could not resist the pleasure of making the kind gift his own.

I could see but one way out of this difficulty, and that was to write to the rector without consulting anybody. I felt certain that if he could only come up, everything would be settled satisfactorily. Perhaps it would never be necessary to let the Veres know I had written; and even if the truth should come out, anything would be better than going on in this unsatisfactory and heart-breaking manner. I would take things into my own hands for once, let the consequences be what they might. Besides, my heedlessness had been partly the cause of Ernest's losing his situation, and I felt it a duty to try every means in my power to atone for it. So with much thought and difficulty, I penned something like the following note:—

"REVEREND SIR, AND MY VERY KIND FRIEND,

"I make bold to trouble you with a few lines to tell you that things here seem as bad as they can be. Your nephew is very ill, and has a great deal on his mind, which I think only you can put to rights. Mrs. Vere is well, but is not strong enough to nurse her son, and Miss Vere is very anxious

about several things. Mr. Lombard has turned Ernest out of his place, because he is in love with his daughter; and Mr. Kauffmann, a great friend of Ernest's, and a painter, has shot himself through the heart, which has made him very ill; and I fear he is dying, or will die, if you do not come up. I should have written before, but was afraid of Miss Vere, who told me never to repeat what happened in this house, so I hope you will not tell her I have written, but come up soon. Coming up will be better than sending or writing.—I am,

"Yours anxiously and respectfully,

"JOHN AYLMER."

I posted this letter secretly, and anxiously awaited consequences. As soon as it was possible I received the following reply, which, to my dismay, was handed me by Miss Vere. I blushed as I opened it, but I felt I had done nothing wrong. It was as follows:—

"DEAR JOHN,

"What has happened? Who is dying? I cannot make your letter out. I shall be with you the same day you receive this. Call for me at the inn where the coach stops. You ought to have written to me long ago. Never mind Florence's nonsense; she was always very wilful and difficult to manage. I find it difficult to forgive you for not writing before; you should not have asked her anything about it.

"Yours in great haste,

"PHILIP MARSHALL."

The handwriting was shaky and agitated. Florence said, "How like that is to my uncle's writing, only not so firm." I answered, "Yes, it is very like;" but I held her in such awe, that I had not courage to tell her the truth. I thought that day longer than any I had ever before spent. I got leave, on account of Ernest's illness, to stay at home, for I was too much excited to be able to apply to my studies, and wandered up and down stairs till Florence declared I should drive her distracted if I did not sit still. At last she desired me to go to Mr. Beverley's, and ascertain if he had returned; sending me on this errand entirely to get me out of the way for a short time, as I well knew. In the streets I met Merton Dashwood, idling about as usual. He came up to me in a very friendly way, really seemed glad to see me, and proposed that we should go to Bloomsbury-square together. We engaged in affectionate converse quite like old times, and I began to hope that our former friendship would again flourish. Merton was more fascinating than I had ever known him, and questioned me with the greatest appearance of interest about the Veres, my own doings, and all the troubles we had gone through. The time passed pleasantly until we reached our destination, when I received the same answer from the maid-servant that had made my heart sink once before. We turned from the door, but, to my surprise, Merton would not leave me. He said he could not allow me to walk home alone, when I was distressed and disappointed; so he cheered me by predicting

brighter days for all of us, and gave me so much comfort that I thought how stupid I had been not to apply to him before. When we reached the Veres' house, Merton still lingered. I thought he wanted to be asked in, and I hesitated to do so, not knowing whether it would be right, under the circumstances; but he said, seeing my dilemma, "I'm not coming in; so pray do not keep turning over in your mind whether your friends will approve of my admittance. I know they would rather not have me, for I've been of late in rather a queer set. Now, will you do an old friend a favour?"

"Of course I will," I replied, "if it is anything in reason."

"I'm regularly done up with regard to money matters. I've been cheated by a set of fellows who ought to know better than to pluck a poor simpleton from the country."

"Oh, Merton, I'm afraid you've been gambling. Why don't you write to your father?"

"My father is not like yours. But I am very unhappy about this, not for myself, but I wanted so much to bring Beauty a present when I go down to the country, which I shall do next week. It's something he set his heart on. If you could lend me two or three pounds, I should be so much obliged to you."

This last appeal for poor Beauty's sake quite softened my heart. And Merton in distress too! I must, I would help him. I ransacked my pockets, and with a lavish generosity gave him all the money I possessed, determined to wait for what I wanted

until my next quarter's allowance was paid. He was profuse in his thanks, and ran away in great spirits.

Ernest was not so well that afternoon, and I looked forward anxiously to the evening. They let me sit with him for an hour or two, and I found him unusually depressed in spirits, and weaker than ever. He talked much of Fanny Lombard; and I soon saw that if matters could be set right in that quarter, he would, in all probability, recover very quickly. I told him I thought some good fortune must be in store for him; I had a presentiment of it, and felt quite certain he would in a little while be happier than he had ever been before. He laughed and shook his head, but said that I cheered him, though he did not believe in my presentiments.

"Where are you going?" said the mother and sister, as I left the sitting-room after tea.

"Only out on a little matter of business. That is not against rules, is it? I shall be back again presently."

No objection was made, but I saw they rather wondered. The evenings were still fine and long, though beginning to be on the decline, and daylight still shone over the city as I wended my way towards the place of meeting. I was not kept waiting many minutes; and as the coach drove up to the inn-door, I perceived my good old friend inside it, peering out of the window from over his spectacles.

"Oh, this travelling! this travelling!" he said;

"it will be the death of me! And now I'm here, how on earth am I ever to get back again?"

But this was more to himself than to me; and as I helped him out of the coach he was eager in his inquiries about his relations.

"Shall I call a hackney-coach, sir, to take you to them?"

"No, no; I'm cramped to death already with sitting boxed up all day. No more of that, if you please; we'll walk."

He engaged rooms for himself, for he said he was not going to incommode the Veres by taking up his abode in their house; and when this business was settled, we walked along the streets arm-in-arm, just as we did long ago across the green fields of the little country parish. During our walk I gave him a rapid sketch of all that had taken place, making free with Ernest's secrets in what some would call a very unjustifiable manner, but which appeared to me highly expedient; and he gave me a very severe reprimand for not having told him all this before.

"I ought to have known it long ago," he said; "and I shall always consider it entirely my fault for not having come up to look after them before. But when people misrepresent matters, as they did, and make one think they are so happy and comfortable, what is a poor old man to do? But there is little to be said in my favour," he continued, checking himself. "I ought to have come and looked after them. There is no excuse for such neglect."

He was just like Ernest about Franz Kauffmann, and nothing I could say would satisfy him. When we reached the house, I begged him to remain downstairs, whilst I called my friends and prepared them for his arrival.

"Miss Vere, Miss Vere," I whispered at Ernest's keyhole, for fear he should be asleep, "come down; a friend has come to see you—a very particular friend. Pray do not be startled."

"Is it Mr. Beverley?" she asked, with something of gloom on her countenance.

"No; somebody you like much better. Only go down, and you'll see." And I remained upstairs, anxiously awaiting the effect of the meeting. In a little while I went down again. Florence was standing by the rector, and both were looking very happy. I was quite surprised at the change in her countenance. The hard lines and fixed expression were gone, and to my mind she appeared quite handsome.

She turned to me and said, "I find we have to thank you for this. My uncle says he is quite sure he can put matters to rights for us, and he will go himself to Mr. Lombard, and try to obtain his consent to Ernest's marriage."

"Yes; and take him a pedigree as long as my arm," said the rector, drawing a roll of parchment from his pocket. "I brought this with me, in case it might be useful; some people think a deal of these things, you know. Where does he live? Can't I go there directly?"

The rector was always in a hurry when a good deed was to be done.

"No, no, my dear uncle; it's too late now. Why, it's past ten o'clock."

"So it is; bless me, I forgot. Well, I'll go to-morrow morning the first thing, before old Crœsus goes out to work—I beg his pardon; I mean, goes down to his office, or whatever it is—and have a quiet talk about it. But I must consult Ernest first; you know we mustn't marry him against his will, must we?" And the rector gave a sly look at me.

Mrs. Vere and Ernest were equally astonished and delighted at his sudden visit. They all spent some time in Ernest's room before retiring to rest, in order to arrange their plans, and talk over family matters, from which I of course was excluded; but I was so praised and thanked by them all afterwards for my sagacity, that I did not feel neglected; and we parted for the night, pleased with each other and ourselves.

"Why did you not let me do it before?" whispered I to Miss Vere.

"Because I did not know it would turn out so well," was the reply.

CHAPTER VII.

THE USE OF A PEDIGREE.

THE rector breakfasted with us the next morning; and it was settled that I should show him the way to Mr. Lombard's, and that he should try all he could to gain his consent to the union of the lovers. We were both sanguine as to the result, and went our way in great spirits. I expected the rector would be very nervous, not having been in a crowd for so many years; but he disdained the help of my arm at the crossings, and walked with so much fire and energy, that I perceived the unwonted journey had done him more good than harm, and that a little more mingling with his fellow-men would make him almost young again. It was pleasant to contrast his fresh and hearty face with the careworn business countenances of those we met; and I laughed as he began to say "Good morning" to the passers-by, as if he were still in the country. He never could bear to pass any one without a salutation; but he soon found that if he continued the practice here, both hat and voice would be worn out in the course of one morning's walk. We were fortunate enough to find Mr. Lombard at home. My courage began to fail as I remembered my last interview with

that awful being; but on communicating my fears to the rector, he said, with a smile,—

"Nonsense, my dear boy. I've got the pedigree in my pocket," and tapped the skirts of his coat with the greatest satisfaction.

We were shown into a small room, and desired to wait a little while, as Mr. Lombard was at breakfast. Presently the great man came in, and bowed courteously to Mr. Marshall, haughtily to me.

"I am Ernest Vere's uncle," began the rector.

"Indeed, sir," was the reply. "I fear you come to solicit me to keep open the situation he was obliged to resign on account of illness, but I am sorry to inform you that this is no longer in my power, as it has been filled up some days."

"You mistake the object of my visit, sir, entirely; I wished to speak to you upon private and family matters."

"Then, sir," returned Mr. Lombard, "I must trouble you to come into another room, as I never discuss those matters in presence of a third person," and he glanced suspiciously at me.

The rector followed him, and I was left alone in almost incontrollable anxiety. I heard them talking in the next apartment; first, in loud and almost angry tones; then the voices grew lower, and seemed in earnest consultation. I thought they never would have done talking. I paced up and down the room, examined the pictures on the walls, and even went the length of scratching my initials on the hearthstone, but could not rest

quietly one moment. After endless hours, as *I* thought, the two gentlemen came into the room looking well satisfied with each other, and the rector gave Mr. Lombard's hand a friendly shake, saying,—

"Then I may tell Ernest to come and plead his own cause, as soon as he is sufficiently recovered."

"Certainly, my dear sir," was the reply; "and Fanny will be a very foolish girl if she does not think as I do on the subject. How are you, my young friend? quite well, hey?" turning to me.

"Quite well, thank you, sir," I replied, astonished at the change in his manner.

"Rather different this from our last meeting, isn't it? haw, haw, haw!" he rejoined, observing my surprise. "But you'll know all about it some day, haw, haw! There's nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream, is there? haw, haw, haw!" and he seemed quite delighted at the idea.

"How strange it is," said the rector, as we left the house, "that a piece of vellum and a few hundreds a-year can transform a man from an object of contempt to one of the greatest respect! But I must tell you all about it. At first the old fox was very angry at my daring to mention the subject, and began talking about position and fortune in an impertinent manner; but I took him very quietly. I let him rate on until he was tired, and then *I* began. 'As to position, my dear sir,' I said, 'will you have the kindness to look at this parchment?' and I unrolled the pedigree with all its emblazoned coats-of-arms. I explained to him

how the Marshalls were descended from the earls marischal of England, and how the Veres, who were allied to them, settled in ——shire in the time of ——; but I dare say Ernest has told you all that long story, so I need not go over it again. You should just have seen the old fellow's face! It is extraordinary how much vulgar people think of these things. He softened his tone immediately, and began asking me about money matters. I told him I intended to leave all I possessed to Ernest, which will be a very tidy little fortune; and in the meantime I would give him, if he married, an allowance to begin with; that Florence and her mother should have a home in my house; and, in short, I made him a party to all my schemes, which, I think, will turn out very well. We had a long talk in Ernest's room last night; and as he says he could never be happy in idleness, we have decided that he shall return to Oxford and read for orders, and then settle down in my parish as my curate; and at my death, if it can be so arranged with the patron, who, I think, would do anything to oblige me, he will succeed me in the living. I told all this to Mr. Lombard, and he heartily assented."

"Well, I wonder at that," said I; "for old Chowse, they say, has ten thousand a-year."

"Very likely; but old Chowse is no gentleman; and Mr. Lombard, in spite of his worship of wealth, would rather have a man of good family and a clergyman for his son-in-law than a vulgar old stockbroker whom nobody likes."

"Well done, old Lombard. I did not think he had so much good taste."

When we reached home, the rector bounced into Ernest's room, and I heard him say in a tone not well suited to the ears of an invalid,—

"Well, my boy, the pedigree did it! I told you it would!"

Ernest speedily recovered. I pass over the exciting event of his proposal and acceptance; his cordial reception by the Lombards; the delight of Mrs. Vere and Mrs. Lombard; and the deep happiness of the engaged lovers. Florence looked six years younger, and the rector was in raptures. It was settled they were all to go down to the rectory for a short time, and that there Ernest was to begin his necessary course of study; and the marriage was to take place directly after his ordination. The rector told me it seemed like his own youth coming over again; but these projects were, I rejoice to say, all destined to have a happy termination, instead of being blighted like the bliss of his early life. It is a comfort to me now in my misery to look back upon the happiness of this young couple, and though now they must be advanced in years, I trust it is still continuing.

I had been so engrossed by the sorrows of the Veres, that I had had little time to think of myself; but now the question occurred to me, "If this home is to be broken up, where am I to go until my year of probation is over?" I wrote to my father, and in reply received permission, as my course of instruction was now nearly finished, to

return home, if I liked it, and prepare for an active sea-life. Captain Dashwood had, my father said, arranged with a friend of his to take me on board his vessel in a month, and I had better come down with the rector, and take leave of my country friends. I joyfully acceded to the proposal; for I was longing to see the country again; pining for the farm, and all the well-known faces that inhabited it; and looking forward once more to beholding my lovely little friend, Beauty. I was longing for him to be old enough to go and seek his fortune in Spain; for I was certain he would find his friends, and intended to give him some advice on the subject. I was also very anxious to see Mary, and ascertain what progress her intimacy with George was making. Before I left the little house where I had spent so many quiet, regular months, an incident occurred which astonished me greatly, and of which I was an unintentional witness. It was a hot and sultry afternoon, and I was lounging in the little balcony that overhung the street. The window curtains were, for the sake of shade, disposed in such a manner, that a person might be in the balcony without being perceived by any one in the sitting-room. The rector and Ernest had gone out to make some purchases; Mrs. Vere was spending the day with Mrs. Lombard; and Miss Vere was the only person in the house besides myself. Presently she came into the sitting-room, and began arranging some papers; I was too lazy to join her, and, to say the truth, I was not fond enough of her society to wish for a *tête-à-tête*. I thought she

would be sure to introduce some grave subject if we were alone, so I gave her no notice of my presence in the balcony. Presently a well-known and peculiar knock was heard at the street door, and, looking down, I saw Mr. Beverley standing on the steps. He did not look up, or he would have seen me, and I should probably have spoilt his plans for that afternoon. I heard him come into the room, and I heard Florence's surprised greeting, for she supposed him to be still in the country. They began talking on common-place subjects, but I noticed an agitation in Mr. Beverley's voice, which was not at all usual. He spoke of the beauty of the country; told her many particulars of his little farm; asked where she preferred living, in town or in the country; and, on receiving the reply, "In the country, certainly," he seemed rather pleased, and said he thought of giving up his great London house, and taking entirely to farming, but the loneliness of the country oppressed him, and he should be sorry not to have any congenial society. However, if he could find a companion to his liking, nothing would please him better than to begin the life of a country gentleman, though it was certainly rather late in the day. I did not know what might be coming next, and rather wished myself out of the way; but it was impossible to move without disturbing them, and putting a stop to the conversation.

"Will you, my dear Miss Florence, be that companion?" said the old gentleman, in an eager voice.

"I should be delighted, if I were any relation to you," was the quiet reply; "but it would look so odd, would it not, for me to live there altogether? Besides, I have promised my uncle to stay with him. But if mamma has no objection, and will come also, I shall be very happy to pay you a visit in the autumn."

"That is not what I mean, my dear Miss Florence. Will you be my wife?"

Miss Vere seemed utterly thunderstruck at the idea, for no reply came for some seconds. Our old friend must have been terribly excited, for I could hear his breathing where I stood. At last she said,—

"I never thought of you in any other light but that of a friend. You have been to me a very dear friend; more like a father than a friend. Do not say any more, for I should not like to think of you with pain."

"You must hear what I have to say," said Mr. Bewerley. "I have watched you long and anxiously. You have captivated me by your many virtues, but hitherto I have been silent. I thought at first I loved you as a daughter, but I found it was not so. I left town in hopes of conquering my feelings, but I heard of your being in trouble, and I returned. I then found your uncle had arrived, and that I was too late to be the happy instrument of extricating you from difficulties, but I determined to confess my deep attachment, and beg you to forget in my devoted love the disparity between our ages. My life, my time, my fortune, shall be devoted to making you happy."

"I feel most deeply sensible of your goodness, Mr. Beverley; but I cannot marry you. You would be disappointed in me; you would require more than I should be able to give."

"I will require nothing but to be allowed to watch over you."

"Pardon me, Mr. Beverley, such a union cannot be productive of happiness. Let us always remain friends, as we are now."

"That is impossible. If we part now, we part forever."

"Why should it be so?"

"Because I cannot trust myself to be with you, and not speak on the subject nearest my heart. I shall only be what I was before I knew you and yours, a lonely old misanthrope."

"How can you be a misanthrope when you do so much good?"

"I am one *in heart* always; but come and help me to do good, and I shall be one no longer. Oh, Florence! you might have so much power to make the world better!"

"Mr. Beverley, I cannot deceive you. I will not promise what I cannot perform. I am deeply indebted to you both for your kindness and your gifts; the gifts I can return, the kindness never." And I fancy she went to a drawer and took out the case of jewels, for he refused something she handed to him, and said, "No, no; I never take back a gift; keep it, I beseech you, in memory of the past, and sometimes think of an unhappy old man." I heard Florence murmur some inarticu-

late words, I heard the door shut, and he was gone.

"Well!" thought I, "I said old gentlemen could sometimes do silly things, and here is a proof of it! I wonder how I am to get out of this balcony without being discovered." I saw Mr. Beverley walk up the street in a hurried manner, and, to my great relief, in a few minutes Florence left the room. I resolved to keep what I had heard to myself; and I may as well say here that I never heard one of the family mention the subject. I know Ernest called on Mr. Beverley two or three times before we left town, but the old gentleman never came near us again.

I had to bid good-bye to old Matthew. I was very sorry to do this, for the old fellow, though rather gruff, had not been unkind to me, and I had really gained much knowledge under his guidance. He was old and infirm, and I should probably never see him again; so I walked down to the little red and black house with by no means pleasurable feelings. But I was going home! there was ecstasy in the thought, and still more ecstasy because I was not obliged to stay there, but was to launch forth shortly on what I confidently imagined to be a life of freedom and adventure.

"You had better take care, lad," said old Matthew, as he received my parting gift, a little pipe which I had bought long before for this occasion, and had spent most of my leisure time in trying to blacken. "You had better take care. You're not one of the right sort for mischief, and yet you

wont stick to goodness. You'll do wrong like most of us, but instead of taking it quietly, you'll make yourself miserable over it. You're too generous for a villain, and too passionate for a good man. You should take a leaf out of Merton Dashwood's book now; there never was such a light-hearted fellow."

I heartily wished I could. Thinking always spoilt my pleasure, and Merton Dashwood never thought. As my mind turned towards the perfections of my friend, I suddenly recollected that I had given him all the money I had, and consequently possessed no funds for the journey. What a dilemma! and how I should be laughed at! I told the rector quietly, and begged him not to mention it to anybody. He never laughed at any one's follies; so lent me the money, and said nothing about it. There never was a happier party travelling westward on a fine September morning than the Veres, the rector, and myself. All five were in the most joyous spirits; and the dear old lady more sprightly than I had ever seen her. Now and then I observed a shade of sadness pass over Miss Vere's face, which I could interpret by remembering the scene between her and Mr. Beverley; but it disappeared as we got farther and farther into the country, and exchanged the smoke and din of the city for bright pasture lands, and golden stubble fields, and watched the cattle quietly grazing near deep delicious pools. We seemed to have suddenly entered upon a new life. It was dark when we entered the village. The coach set down

the rectory party at the gate of that pretty gabled residence, and then I ran like lightning to the farm. It is needless to relate what a greeting I received there! Any one who has the happiness of possessing affectionate relations can easily imagine it.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEAVE-TAKINGS.

THE Lombards were to come and pay the rector a visit later in the autumn. That would not be until after I had entered upon my sea-life. I did not see so much of the Veres, and the rector, after our return as I had done in London. They had much to do, and much to think about, and their friends and acquaintances lay in a different sphere. They were very kind to me; but they were gentlefolks, and I and my family were not. In a town, the man who wears the best coat and has the most pleasing address, is generally the most thought of; but in the country every one knows every one else's history, and the lines of society are far more broadly marked. I soon observed the intimacy between my father and Captain Dashwood. They smoked their pipes together nearly every evening, discussed all manner of subjects, and found, to my surprise, a wonderful reciprocity of sentiment upon all important topics. I also found out accidentally that my father was in the habit of lending the captain money, and had two or three times got him out of great difficulties. The captain repaid this with a liberal dose of flattery, and by deferring to my father's opinion in all things. My

brothers, I found, did not look upon this intimacy with great favour, but their opinion was not asked. My mother was not so unsuspicious as my father, and did not encourage these visits. I often thought of telling what I had heard from George about the alias and other things, but pride and shame held me back, and I comforted myself with the belief that my father would never hear anything against the man who exercised such a powerful fascination over him. But it is time to say something of Mary and the other actors in my little home history.

I did not let many hours slip by before seeking the companion of my childhood. All at home were loud in her praises, and my mother said she was the most industrious, trustworthy, and amiable girl in the parish. I asked if George Weston had been much at Little Dale lately.

"Not a great deal," was the reply; "both are so busy; but I think they generally meet on market days."

"People say they are keeping company," remarked my elder brother Tom, who was commonly reported to be paying his addresses to a farmer's daughter in the next parish, and who, therefore, took a keen interest in all love affairs.

"What nonsense!" said my mother, who did not approve of early marriages. "Why Mary is only sixteen, not older than John, and George Weston is too young yet by a great deal. Time enough to think about that ten years hence."

What would my mother have said could she

have known my secret thoughts! Like old Mr. Beverley, she would have anathematized the precocity of youth. As soon as I could get away, I set off for Little Dale, and was fortunate enough to find Mary in the garden. She gave a little start of surprise at finding me so close to her, and I thought seemed better pleased to see me than she had ever been before. I waited for no formal greeting, but rushed towards her, exclaiming,—

"Oh, Mary, Mary, how glad I am to see you!" She let fall the rake she held, (it looked like the identical rake she had once thrown at my head,) and shook hands with me cordially.

"Oh, John, what a long, long year you have been away!"

This speech fell from her lips in the excitement of the moment, and was evidently repented of as soon as spoken. But I had heard enough to encourage me, and began rapidly to pour out my love and my joy, my hopes and my fears, in a torrent of language.

"But, Johnny," she said, "you cannot care for me as you did, you have been living amongst such grand people lately. They say you have brought a power of fine folk back with you."

"None that I care for half as much as you, Mary," I continued, vehemently. "Townfolk are not like countryfolk, after all. Besides, all those people belong to the rector. But come, I will tell you their history, it is as interesting as a book, and all really true." So we sat down together in the little arbour, and I told her all the romantic his-

tory of the loves of Ernest Vere and Fanny Lombard, and she was as interested and as excited as I could possibly wish. "Could you, Mary," I exclaimed,—"could you have been as constant as Fanny Lombard, and for such a length of time?"

"I don't know," said Mary. "For such a person as Mr. Vere must be from your account, I think I could. But then, whoever loved me must be as constant as he was."

"And he *will* be as constant, dear Mary. I am going away next month for many years perhaps, but only say you love me, and will marry me when I have a ship of my own, and the thought of you shall never be absent from my heart." I know not what answer I should have received, if we had had a minute longer to ourselves; but by the glistening of her eyes, I could perceive the speech was not unpleasant to her, when we were suddenly interrupted by Mrs. Alton's voice.

"So, John Aylmer, very pretty talking indeed," she exclaimed, in her sharp voice. She had been coming up the walk behind the arbour, and had overheard my passionate protestations. "The minute you're back again you must needs come talking nonsense to my Mary. And now that I've found you out I may as well say what I have to say at once, and then there'll be no misunderstanding between us. In the first place, I've no wish to see my Mary married at all; men are more trouble than they're worth, and more plague than profit. I say nothing about my old man, for he was an exception; he had only one fault, and that was,

he was of such a nasty, wicked disposition; I never had a moment's peace with him; but that's all gone by now, so let it be. Well, if my Mary ever does marry, a thrifty, honest, tidy man shall be her husband; none of your fine gentlemen, mind, but one that will take care of her and himself too. Now, look you, John Aylmer; if you choose to work steadily until my Mary is five-and-twenty, for that's the earliest, according to my notions, that a young woman ought to marry, seeing that few of them know their own minds till then, then I'll give my consent to your marrying her, if she'll have you, though I should much rather have some one else I know of for a son-in-law; but it's no use speaking of that, for if you tell a girl the name of the man you wish her to marry begins with an A., she'll never rest until she has married one whose name begins with a Z."

"It's a long time to wait, ma'am," I replied, quite taken aback.

"So it may be; but what's worth having is worth waiting for; so you may make up your mind. It wasn't I who began the subject, remember."

"Time can make no difference in my feelings Mrs. Alton; and when I get a ship of my own, I shall ask Mary to—to—share my fortunes."

I looked round, but Mary had disappeared, evidently anxious to escape such an embarrassing conversation, and I was left face to face with the prudent mother.

"Very well, John Aylmer," she replied, "make no promises, but show by your actions that you in-

tend to be a steady, honest man. Talk no more fine stuff to Mary, but go about your business and be useful. I shall not forbid you to come here now and then before you start, but the sooner you start the better." And so our conversation ended.

It appeared that I was not to see Mary again that day; for, on timidly asking whether I might wish her farewell, Mrs. Alton said, "No; she is busy, and you have talked together enough for one day! You have wasted half her morning already. Good-bye." So I walked down the hill, not knowing whether to be pleased or sorry, and went my way to the Dashwood's house, determined not to wait till the evening for the pleasure of seeing my friend Beauty. He was sitting outside the door, trying to carve a piece of wood into some resemblance to a goat, and as I stood for a moment watching his graceful and dignified attitude, and saw how little he heeded the rays of the bright autumn sun streaming down on his head, I felt that I looked upon a true child of the South. Directly he perceived me, he threw aside his occupation, and greeted me with unfeigned joy. His English had much improved during the past year, and he spoke it now with greater ease than Spanish, which, for want of practice, had been well-nigh forgotten.

"Kind, good brother, are you back again once more?"

"Yes, Carlos, dear; but why did you not write to me?"

"I did once, but the captain saw it, and he said it was too bad English to send. It was blotted;

too; for he and your father were playing at back-gammon whilst I was writing, and they shook the table so. I was going to write another letter, but the captain said he was certain you would not care to hear from me, you had many other friends, and were much too busy."

"The captain was much mistaken then, and I think it very unkind of him to have said such a thing. Has Merton been down here lately?"

"Oh yes! about a fortnight ago. He went away yesterday. He could not have known you were coming, or he would have stayed a little while longer. He always speaks so affectionately of you; but he said you had got amongst fine friends, and did not care to be much with him now."

"What a story! He did not care to be with me, that's how it was; he had got amongst a bad lot of people, only you had better not tell his father so, it might get him into disgrace."

"You needn't be afraid of that; I don't think captain is over-particular," and Beauty looked round, as if he were afraid of being overheard.

"Do show me the present Merty brought you," I said.

"What present? He never brought me any present. He calls me pretty names, but that doesn't cost anything, you know," said Carlos, with a smile.

"Why, he told me he wanted to bring you something you had very much wished for, and begged me to lend him the money, as he had spent all his own."

"I never wished for anything, and if I had I would rather have told you about it. That's the reason, I suppose, he went away in such a hurry, when you were coming down. Merton never seems the least to care about a lie or two."

"I suppose he had got into some scrape which my money helped him out of, and he does not find it convenient to return it at present. He might just as well have said so at once; he ought to have known me better than to suppose I should have dunned him." For though my faults were many, I never cared a straw about money, and would willingly have given away all I had.

"Don't you trust Merton too much," said Carlos. "I do not like him so much as I did. Your brother Tom is much more to my taste now. He always says what he means, and makes no fine stories about things."

"How odd," I thought, "that this high-spirited boy should prefer my simple, hard-working brother Tom to the poetical, fascinating Merton." And I proceeded to account for it in my own mind with my favourite theory of each soul loving a contrast to itself. I did not know then the influence which an honest, straightforward, simple character has over those often much more talented than itself. Carlos and I spent that day together, and many others also before I finally left my home. My advice concerning his future course was needless, for he had long ago resolved to set off and seek his fortune in Spain, the moment he was old enough, and could get leave from the captain. The captain

I saw often, but he did not take much notice of me. All his attention seemed devoted to my father and mother, and he even went the length of going to church with them sometimes, though he yawned and fidgeted excessively when he got there. My mother was congratulating herself on his improvement, and imagined she was leading a sinner into the right way; tender delusion! which good and simple souls are peculiarly liable to. Miss Clarke went on in the old way—universal confidante, universal refuge of the desolate and oppressed; her garden and the poor her chief care, herself the only one unthought of by that ever-busy mind. She received me with her usual kindness, alluded to no disagreeable topics, talked of Mary with unabated affection, and listened with great interest to the history of my town-life. She said she should go and call on Mrs. Vere, as she was certain from my description she should like to know her. This she accordingly did, and the two ladies soon became great friends. The arrival of the rector's family gave great satisfaction in the village. Miss Vere was soon introduced to all the poor, amongst whom she worked with the energy that distinguished everything she did, and no doubt found this sort of employment far pleasanter than copying for Mr. Silverpen at twopence a page. The rector was in his element. His hitherto solitary home was now graced by the presence of two happy faces, and his benevolent nature rejoiced in ministering to their comfort.

"How young and handsome the rector looks," said my mother, one evening, as we sat round the supper-table. "If it were not for his spectacles and white hair, nobody would imagine he was an old man. I wonder he has never married."

As the time drew near for my departure I felt more regret than pleasure. I appreciated the advantages of our quiet, happy village all the more for my year's absence, and it went to my heart to think that many years might pass before I saw it again. I clung to each well-known spot with an affection I never thought myself capable of feeling, and visited my sister's grave with a yearning longing that she could be with me and listen to all my distresses. Even then my love was selfish, for I wished for her in order that she might minister to my necessities. I felt that no one else could do this, not even the nearest and dearest friend. Mary could not remember all the things Sophy could, when I had been allowed the pleasure of unrestricted intercourse with her; how much less now, that our every movement was watched by her careful and jealous mother. George I only saw once. He was busy; always at work. Work, work, everlasting work! This seemed the lot of every one, gentle and simple, with whom I was acquainted; and this would be my lot certainly, if I resolved to brave the ridicule of my friends, give up my projects, and stay at home. If I went to sea, I should have to work too, but it would not be in doing the same thing every day, and there

might be many ways of escaping it altogether. Oh, how I wished I had been born a gentleman, and had no necessity to earn my living!

"But then most gentlemen have to earn their own living," said Ernest, when I once poured out my griefs to him; "and head-work is mostly harder than hand-work. Besides, you would be miserable if you had nothing to do."

"Just try me," said I. "I should like nothing better than to idle away my whole life."

"And get into mischief," he replied; "which you certainly would."

"Well, I shouldn't care," I answered, recklessly; "mischief is more exciting than work. And workers get into mischief too; look at Kauffmann, who worked himself into a brain-fever, and then shot himself."

"He did not work with a good motive," said Ernest, and he shuddered, as he always did when that fearful scene was alluded to. "But look at George Weston—a friend of yours, I believe, too—how hard he works, and I hear nothing but praises of him on all sides. He seems to be considered the model man of the parish."

"Oh, now you're going to begin about George, are you?" I thought, but I did not express my thoughts aloud. "Mr. Lombard is a worker, too," I said, "and a very agreeable specimen he is."

"I have no right to speak of Mr. Lombard's faults," answered Ernest. "You know I am soon to be his relation." He spoke as if I were not aware of the fact. It was his quiet way of telling

me that my choice of an example was distasteful to him. "Let us speak of ourselves. When are you to start on your voyages?"

"In a week's time. I go with a friend of Captain Dashwood's, by name James Boldero. We are bound for the West Indies, I believe, and I know not where afterwards. I shall now have some chance of seeing the world."

"Yes," said Ernest, laughing, "and we shall have some chance of seeing—

> How far the fool who has been sent to Rome
> Excels the fool that has been kept at home?

Isn't that right? It's something like it, I know."

"I don't know, I'm sure," I replied, with an air of offended dignity; for I disliked being laughed at as much as ever.

"Don't be affronted. I'm the fool that has been kept at home. I do not suppose I shall move out of England all the days of my life; and to tell you the truth, I shall not very much care. You will never see anything prettier than what we can see without moving very far from the rectory door."

"You cannot see coral islands, or palm-trees, or the Peak of Teneriffe, or the great blue rolling waves of the broad Atlantic."

"No," replied Ernest; "but I can see a little world of home-happiness, a few faces that I tenderly love, and many others for whom I have a sincere regard."

"You cannot find gold dust, or pearls, or——"

"Really," said Ernest, "one would think you

thoroughly believed the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor to be taken from real life. People don't pick up treasures by handfuls now, as they did in the days of fiction."

"At any rate," I continued, "there is more to be got than by staying in England, and farming all the days of my life."

"Ah, you and I have different ideas about happiness; we never did agree upon that point, you know," said Ernest. And he walked away, humming—

A happy lot must sure be his,
The lord, not slave of things,
Who values life for what it is,
And not for what it brings.

"Humph!" thought I. "Very odd ideas he has about happiness. Teaching dirty children, and reading to old women. But I suppose Fanny Lombard's pretty face has made all that seem very romantic just at present. When he is quietly settled down for life, he will begin in a short time to find it vastly unentertaining. Heigho! I wish Merton was going in the same ship with me. I wish—I wish——" and so I went on, for it would not have been me, if I had no ungratified wishes. I longed to be older. I wanted to be married, and take Mary on board with me; I felt certain she would make a good corsair's wife, for a corsair I certainly meant to be. I should name my ship after her, "The Mary." But that did not sound well. How I wished she had been given a more romantic name! Captain Dashwood's first ship, he told me,

had been called "The Mary Jane." That sounded worse than the Mary without the Jane. Would it improve it to add my own name, "The Mary and John?" Worse and worse; that would never do. I must get Mary to allow me to call her by some foreign name; Inez or Juanita, if she preferred southern climes; or Brynhilda or Thekla, if she had a fancy for a northern name. I would consult her on the subject. I did so, and begged her to choose another name, for I was tired of Mary.

"Well, Johnny," she replied, rather hurt, "if you want to call me something else, you may do so; but I will not have any outlandish, ridiculous names. I don't like it much, but if you really wish it, you may call me Polly."

Polly, indeed! Mary was getting more and more prosaic.

During the month of my stay at home, I did not again allude to the tender subject I had broached. Mary gave me no opportunity; and always when we were alone together diligently requested my opinion on some point of natural history, some habit of birds or beasts, or some other subject of conversation which I thought much less interesting than our own personal past and future. She had received instructions from her mother upon her manner of proceeding, or had repented the dear little imprudent speeches that showed me her heart was not untouched. George came over once to see me, but our meeting was cold and constrained. I could not forget our quarrel; and though I had reason to believe that some of his

ideas, if not all, were correct, I could never forgive him for having tried to open my eyes. My suspicions about Merton and his father were greatly confirmed by the conduct of the former towards myself; but I was too proud to confess myself mistaken in my estimate of character, and too timid to warn my father of the possible consequences of his intimacy with the latter. It was none of my business, and I would take care how I lent Merton any more money. My jealousy of George had by no means subsided. He had grown a fine young man, with an open, frank expression that won all hearts. He was not graceful, and by the side of Merton would have been accounted clumsy; but there was a muscular development about the arms and shoulders which bore ocular testimony to the great strength for which he was celebrated, and he was the best wrestler and back-sword player for miles round. His great good-nature made him beloved everywhere, and as Mary, to my dismay, one day remarked, "He looks as if he could lift any man in the parish with his little finger, saying all the time, Don't be frightened, I would not hurt you for the world." He said to me before we parted,—

"I see you and young Dashwood are not so intimate as you were, or else he would never have left his father's the day before you were coming down; how is that?"

"Oh, we've got into a different set," I replied, carelessly.

"I'm glad of it. Do you not think it would be

as well to give your father a hint that the captain is living here under an alias?"

"Do it yourself," I replied, in a surly manner. "A talebearer's work is not my favourite employment."

"Neither is it mine," was the quiet answer. "But you objected before to my saying anything to your father about this man, and called me a sneak if I did."

"I should think my father is old enough to choose his own associates," I muttered; and there the matter dropped.

We heard nothing of Mr. Beverley, except through Davis, the timid young clerk, who was rather a favourite with Mrs. Vere, and therefore kept up a correspondence with her. He communicated to us the intelligence that the eccentric old gentleman had left London, and established himself for good in his small country house, having first got Davis appointed to succeed him as secretary to his pet philanthropic society, at a salary of a hundred and fifty pounds a year, which quite satisfied the young man's modest wishes. He did not know that the hundred pounds was paid by Mr. Beverley himself, and only the fifty by the society. "People express great surprise," continued Davis, "that he should have left all his schemes and occupations in London; almost as much surprise as they expressed when he began them; but I for one have no reason to complain, though I fear I shall make but a poor substitute. He satisfied no one's curiosity, and the reason still remains un-

discovered." Florence knew the reason, and so did I; I wonder if any one else knew?

My last Sunday at home. My heart is full of tender memories as I look back upon that day. We all met at church, and I worshipped surrounded by those (except one) who had loved me in my childhood. The light streamed from the lattice window upon the head of the old rector, and made his hair look that beautiful radiant white we read of in the Revelations, and I could not help contrasting that venerable head with the olive complexion and glossy black hair of Carlos, who sat near him, listening with upturned face to the animated discourse that seemed delivered expressly for my benefit. I say *seemed*, for the rector's sermons always fitted my conscience exactly; but each member of the congregation would probably have said the same. This time the text was part of the 13th verse of the 4th chapter of the 2nd Book of Kings: "And she answered, I dwell among mine own people." He contrasted the contented mind of the Shunammite woman with the restless, striving, excitable spirit of men of the world, and drew a lovely picture of the quiet heart resting under the wings of the Almighty. He pointed out the beauty and the privilege of being allowed to dwell amongst one's own people, amongst those whose faces have been familiar to us from childhood. "Go where you will, my brethren," he said, "you will never find elsewhere the peace, the serenity, the love, which sheltered you in your youth. The ancients esteemed as one of the highest blessings

to dwell, every man, under his own vine and his own fig-tree; the moderns undervalue this blessing; nay, some esteem it a curse, and pine with unwholesome longings for other spheres and other duties than those which have been assigned to them. The heart that is at peace with God is happy anywhere; but most of all, happy when dwelling amongst its own people. I do not mean that it cannot be happy also in far-off countries, nay, even at the ends of the earth; but then it must be called thither by the voice of duty, and not for the gratification of mere selfish desires. Think not that I would blame adventurous spirits; those who long to serve their country are worthy of all praise; but I deprecate the longing for change, the pining after excitement, the striving after distinction merely for distinction's sake, which are all characteristics of the times we live in. My brethren, those who undervalue their home and their Church will never do much for their country." And at the conclusion of his sermon, the old man said:—"One who is with us this day will worship with us no more for a long, long time to come. We should pray for those who go out from amongst us, for those who cannot dwell any more among their own people,—therefore I request your prayers for him, that he may preserve a pure and unsullied heart, and that the remembrance of the Church of his fathers may be carried with him to far distant lands, and be productive not only of good to himself, but also of good to others." This personal allusion pleased all and astonished none;

for my native parish was inhabited by a homely, simple race, who thought such a wonderful event fully deserving of public notice. It was seldom, indeed, that a parishioner struck out a line of his own, and the concerns of one interested all. The rector, too, had a habit of remarking in the pulpit on such concerns of his flock as were publicly known. "Such an interest as he takes in us!" remarked one old woman; "a funeral, or a wedding, a going away, or a christening, nothing comes amiss to him!"

That Sunday is impressed upon my mind with indelible distinctness. I did not wish Mary good-bye when we met outside the church, because I thought I should have a better opportunity after evening service, and so, too, I suppose, thought her mother, for she took care to send her out of the way. She was escorted to another church by a certain grim old aunt, who had come down to stay a few weeks at Mrs. Alton's, to make herself disagreeable, and keep watch over Mary, as her strict mother was occasionally called away by the serious illness of a relation who lived a few miles off, and to whom she went backwards and forwards as her occupations allowed her. To add to my dismay, this was the very church I knew George was in the habit of attending. I said farewell to the rector and his relations at the church door, and if good wishes could bring happiness, I am sure I ought to have had no lack of it.

All our party at the farm were to drink tea at Miss Clarke's cottage, taking care to be home in

time to receive the captain, who came for his usual smoke in the evening with my father. What a squeeze it was in the little cottage parlour; and how merry we tried to be in spite of the heaviness that lay upon some of our hearts, for my mother and I could at times hardly restrain our tears. Carlos, too, by special favour, was allowed to join the party, for his attachment to me was well-known, and Miss Clarke never neglected anything that could make her guests happy. Beauty's vivacity had forsaken him; he was absorbed by one idea, namely, that he should not see me for many years to come.

"When you come back, brother, perhaps I shall be gone to Spain, and then how shall we ever meet again?"

"You must write to me, Beauty, and ask me to come and see you in your Spanish home; remember, you have promised me a province when you are a great man."

And so we went on, in gentle, melancholy talk, trying to comfort each other and ourselves, till the shades of evening closed over the distant hills and the little quiet village.

The morning came, and I dwelt no more "among mine own people."

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROPOSAL.

I WILL not give a minute account of my voyages. Suffice it to say, that I was disappointed, bitterly disappointed. My companions were rough, wild men, who seemed to have no ambition but that of increasing their bodily comforts, and whose amusements were as coarse as their manners. I visited many lands, and traversed many seas, but few of the human beings into whose company I was thrown ever had any good influence on my character. They were too unspiritual; they seemed utterly careless as to what became of themselves or anybody else, and provided they had drink, tobacco, and singing, in plenty, no outward event affected them, and no inward conjectures disturbed their minds. Minds? I often wondered whether they had any, and still oftener wondered whether it were worth while to aspire to lead such men. Though I was old in mind I was slight in body; and my physical weakness often caused me to be ill-used by the rough, strong natures around me. How often did I mourn and long for the despised farm, and its homely duties and pleasures! How often I leant over the bows and wept, whilst my companions were shouting their wild songs with half-

intoxicated mirth! And, then again, there were moments of wonderful happiness, when I kept the night-watch all alone with the stars, and felt as if I were the only being in the world; when I saw the sun set like a globe of fire in the distance, or rise in awful magnificence over the little crowd of vessels that dotted the ocean like a flock of sea-birds; when I wandered alone under palm-trees, or revelled in the gigantic scenes of nature I had so often read of, so often longed for; all these were times of unequalled delight; but they faded away, and I had to encounter the rude jests, the unfeeling sarcasms of those who saw no beauty where I found such splendour. At other times these feelings would depart, and I would smoke and drink with the worst of them, and learn to shout their songs and join their sports, and then I was in favour with them. Meantime, my project of getting a few high, mighty, and discontented spirits to join me, and lead a buccaneering life with me for their leader, was completely out of the pale of probability. I had to work, and work hard too. Sailors in real life were not like those I had read of in books. Where were the grand feelings, the hatred of oppression, the contempt of the ways of the world, I had imagined to be characteristics of those who go down to the sea in ships? There was no more poetry in these men than I could discover in the clowns of my native parish. My character did not improve by associating with them. I grew daily more hard and selfish, more regardless of the feelings of others, more bent upon having all I wished

for, and more ready to fly in the face of Heaven. Years passed away and I had only paid two short visits to my home. My brothers were both married, and had taken farms in the neighbourhood of Oakwood. My father was proud of them. They had both fulfilled his highest expectations; were treading in his footsteps, and bade fair to be men of consideration in their own sphere. In a worldly point of view, even I had been successful, more so certainly than I deserved. Though neither persevering nor industrious, I had great natural talents, and had learnt my lesson well under old Matthew. Consequently I was a clever navigator, therefore gained much consideration in some quarters; and before nine years were over my head had it in my power to inflict as much tyranny upon others as I myself had suffered under. My father, ever generous and confiding, had advanced me a sum of money, and by the time I was five-and-twenty I found myself commander and part owner of a tight little merchant schooner. When I was entire owner, as I meant to be some day, I would no more have to do with mercantile pursuits; but mount two brass guns and go off to the southern seas in search of booty. Merton Dashwood and I had never been on board the same ship, but he had crossed my path once or twice, and on each occasion had made himself as agreeable as ever; of course, never hinting at repaying me the money I had lent him. Carlos had gone to Spain in search of his relations. Ernest had married Fanny Lombard, and was living at the rectory as curate to his

uncle, who was now in failing health. Such was the posture of affairs when I resolved to return, and fulfil my early day-dream by obtaining Mary as my bride, and carrying her off to a life of excitement and adventure. Hardly had I landed in England when I received the following letter from my brother Tom :—

"DEAR JACK,

"As soon as you receive this, pray come home. Things have got into a strange muddle, and will go hard, I fear, with our poor father. I never liked his friendship for *your* friend, Captain Dashwood, neither did our mother, neither did Alfred. But he would say, this old rascal was a fine fellow and had been very kind to you, and he liked to go and smoke with him, and hear all his nonsensical stories, because he said you, too, were a sailor, and it gave him an idea of what sailor-life was. I knew no good could come of it all, and Carlos used to tell me enough of the captain's goings-on, for me to see that the less we had to do with him the better. Indeed, Carlos went to Spain sooner than he would have done, in order to get away from the sight of what he knew to be wrong. But our father never would believe anything against him, and if he ever had a suspicion he would go and tell it to the captain, who talked him over directly. Since I have been settled, I have seen less of our father, and Alfred too has had little time to go over to Oakwood, and so we have almost left him in the lurch. You saw when

you were here last how Dashwood could get any money he wanted out of our father, and now I find that some time ago he was induced to stand security for a large amount, and bill signing and I don't know what, has gone on all along on account of the villain's fine stories; for he made out that he was an injured individual, and the victim of some rich old uncle's wrath because he had years ago married a farmer's daughter; there was a great deal more also that I forget, but I know he trumped up just such a story as would make my father do anything he liked. Things went on in this way for a long time, we all grumbling because Dashwood had more influence with my father than any one of us, when one fine morning some scoundrels of the law came down and arrested my father for ever so much money. We sent for Dashwood, but he had decamped in the night, where to nobody knew; and my father was left to pay all liabilities. We then discovered that Dashwood was not his real name, that he had been living for years in concealment, and thanks to my father and a gang of smugglers, of which he was the real, though not the apparent head, he had amassed a tolerable sum to go off with. How all this was discovered it puzzles my brains now to think of; but the end of it was, that the creditors finding my father to be an honest man, agreed to give him time to settle his affairs, and took his word not to abscond. I and Alfred will gladly do what we can to help, but I fear we shall not be able to do much. The farm must be given up, and all the stock and

everything else be sold, all the things my father used to pride himself on. Mr. Vere is very kind, and comes down every day to talk matters over, and try to find a way through these difficulties, but clergymen don't know much of farming or of accounts. My father got quite stupid-like with the blow, and my mother will not believe it yet. They are so attached to the old place. I want you to come and settle what is best to be done, to persuade them to live either with Alfred or me, or else to let us take a little cottage for them and maintain them between us all three. Or, who knows? You may be a rich man by this time, and able to put things right better than we can, and if you can I am sure you will. At any rate come and see.

"Ever your true brother,

"T. A."

Tom's concise and business-like manner of writing betrayed no emotion; but the marks of two or three large tears were on the paper, and I knew how much he must have suffered before such signs of grief could be wrung from him. It is difficult to describe the sensations with which I read this letter. Remorse for the past, and fear for the future were strangely blended. I felt that I was to blame, that upon my shoulders rested, in a great measure, the responsibility of these disastrous occurrences. I ought to have been honest and open; I ought to have told my father exactly what George had told me, or else have allowed him to do so.

But my absurd jealousy, my blind infatuation, had caused the ruin of my family. I was born to be a curse to them. I felt it; I knew it. And what should I do? I must sell my share in the schooner; I must sacrifice everything I possessed. Then, what was to become of my prospects, and Mary? I was furious at the thought. Then Tom, too, was fully aware of the share I had had in causing the family misfortunes, for he said with emphasis in the beginning of his letter; "*Your* friend, Captain Dashwood," as if he *would* have said, "See what *you* have brought us to!" It was unkind of Tom to twit me in this manner. And so I overlooked the last kind sentences of his letter, and dwelt only upon the one I fancied unbrotherly; of course I resolved to hasten home immediately, not at all clear what I should do when I got there, but resolving to shape my course according to circumstances.

With no pleasant feelings did I start on my journey. I had pictured myself returning home a kind of hero to the simple country folk, finding all prospering, and Mary ready to join her fate to mine; her mother proud and happy at obtaining such a son-in-law, and George burning with envy at my success; but now who would give their daughter to the son of a ruined family? I felt half mad with disappointment, and highly enraged with my father for being so duped. I called his unsuspecting nature stupidity, and forgot how easily I myself could be taken in by any one who would flatter my self-love. I felt glad that poor

Sophy was at peace, and out of the way of all this misery; but I grieved, bitterly grieved for my mother. This was the only gentle feeling that found place in my heart, which was full of sullenness, as, in the dusky December twilight, I drew near the precincts of my home. An old gate with ancient stone-posts was the entrance to the deeply rutted lane, forming the approach to the manor house; and a heavy stone ball used to crown each post. Now, however, I remarked that, by some accident or other, they had been knocked off, and were reposing in a shallow pond by the road-side. I took this as an omen, and muttered, "All gone to ruin like everything else! We are an ill-fated family, and I the most ill-fated of all!" Tom was standing in the shadow of the door, as I approached. He came forward and prevented my entering the house.

"Walk up and down a bit," he said, "if you are not tired, and I will tell you all I know of this unfortunate affair. It will save explanations, and my father and mother will not have to go over the same ground with you. Oh Jack! it's a sad business!"

Long, long we walked up and down the road, whilst poor Tom gave me the history of the complicated villany of Dashwood, and all the trouble it had brought upon our house. The outline was substantially the same as that given in his letter; but there were various intricacies which could only be explained by word of mouth, and which I have now forgotten. He dwelt with much feeling on

the kindness shown by all our old friends; particularly by the Veres, and by the Westons. George had come over immediately, on hearing the news, with a message from his father, offering a loan of £500. Ernest Vere had been indefatigable in his attentions; but it was little he could do in the way of pecuniary assistance, as five promising children of his own were now added to his cares for the parish. "My father," continued Tom, "has rejected all offers of help until he finds that all his exertions cannot make up the required sum. If the money could be paid by instalments, we might manage it without this sacrifice; but the worst of it is, that the whole sum is required at once. You know he advanced you a large sum last year, and before that he had been at great pains to stock a farm for me and Alfred."

"Why not," I asked, "borrow the money from different friends, and thus pay off by instalments?"

"The very question *I* asked," replied Tom, "but my father does not approve of it. Nothing will content him short of giving up everything."

"I must sell my share in the schooner, I suppose," I said, not with a very good grace it must be owned.

"I thought you would say so," said Tom, with a grateful pressure of the hand. "This will help a good deal, and you are the youngest of us, and still unburdened with a family, so you will have plenty of time to work it up again."

So they seemed to think it was no sacrifice!

"Of course," I said, rather hurt, "this will

entirely destroy my hopes of marrying Mary Alton, for her mother will never consent now."

"Do you still think of that?" said Tom, surprised. "We thought that fancy of yours would have gone off long ago, particularly as George has been there so much lately."

Particularly as George has been there so much lately! This excited my love and jealousy to its highest pitch, and I replied,—

"I am certain Mary prefers me, and I will marry her in spite of George, her mother and everybody else."

"Of course you can, if she wishes it," said Tom, surprised at my vehemence; "she is of age; she can do as she likes, I suppose. But come into the house; I think I have told you everything, and it is getting unpleasantly cold out here."

The windows of the kitchen were shining in the distance, just as I remembered them when I used to return from my evenings spent with the rector so long ago, and the fire glowed upon the hearth as brightly as of yore. But where was the merry party that used to congregate beside it?

"I'll just tell them you're come," said Tom, "and then I must be off, for my wife finds it lonesome when I'm away in the evening, and the children are in bed." So on he went up the old oak staircase, and left me to pursue my troubled reflections alone. I could hardly believe that our fortunes had fallen to so low an ebb. Everything looked the same, but still a strange silence seemed to reign over the house, and I felt that a blight

had fallen upon it. Do what I could, it was impossible for me to exonerate myself from the responsibility of having helped to cause it.

In a few minutes Tom reappeared. "They're coming down directly," he said. "Father's been unwell most of the day, and kept his room. Good night, old fellow, don't be down-hearted; something may turn up yet. Who knows?" he continued, pitying my blank expression of countenance, and went out of the house, apparently anxious to escape witnessing the meeting. I leant my head upon my hand, and shading my eyes, endeavoured to think my way out of the perplexities of my situation, when I felt a soft touch upon my shoulder, and starting up, was clasped in my mother's embrace, so long, so earnestly, words could not have expressed so well the emotions of that moment. We sat for a few moments without speaking, with clasped hands, only too happy at being together. My mother's face had little changed since I had last seen it; but her hair was sprinkled with grey, and her mouth wore that expression of resolution and capability of suffering which I had seen upon it after my dear sister's death. At last I managed to say, "How's father?"

"Better now; but he has been very ill. This has been a sad blow to him; and even now we did not know all our misfortunes. There is more behind, I fear, and your father will keep on repeating that it is all caused by his own folly. But, hush! I hear him coming!"

And a heavy footstep descended the stair.

My father entered, and, with something of a groan, held out his hand to me.

"Oh, Jack!" he said, "why didn't you tell me as much about this villain as George told *you?*"

I was defenceless; but my mother, ever full of kindness, interposed. "Don't blame the boy, Samuel; he was very young then, and could not foresee the consequences. If we had wanted to know, we could have found it out from others; but we were both blind."

Both, indeed? She, for one, had always disapproved the intimacy; but her's was not the disposition to recollect this now. So she took half the blame on herself, as she always had taken half of his joys and sorrows.

"But I can't understand," I exclaimed, heartily willing to change this part of the subject—"I can't understand how Dashwood could have involved you so. How could he have had such large money transactions? What was the object of them? What could he do with them?"

"There were shares in all sorts of things," replied my father, "besides his dealings with me. He used to take journeys on the sly, too, at the very time when he pretended he had not the health to move, and see after a gang of thieves down at some port. It will take a long time to unravel the thread; but if you want to know all particulars, you must go to the lawyers; they're hard at it. It's a hard thing, in my old days, to be brought to this! But if it were only myself, I should not care; but your poor mother, John——" And the old man's

voice was choked with emotion. My mother opened the old leathern Bible I recollected all my life, and pointed out to him these words:—"I have been young, and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread."

My father made no answer, but filled his pipe, and lighted it. In olden days, that was always a good sign. It seemed as if he had made up his mind to bear with equanimity whatever might happen. My mother prepared my evening meal, and I left them alone until it was ready, for I felt that I indeed had little power to comfort the afflicted.

My father never uttered another word of reproach to me. Indeed, it was not his way to moan over what was done, and could not be helped; but that evening our conversation did not flow briskly, and though I tried all I could to break the formality by recounting some of my maritime adventures, my father was preoccupied, and my mother was so anxious about him, that it was with difficulty she could manage to interest herself in anything else. My reflections that night were of a very unpleasant nature. I should go to Little Dale, certainly, the next morning; but from what I knew of Mrs. Alton's thrifty ways and ideas, I felt convinced that a ruined suitor like myself would meet with a very poor reception. But things were destined to turn out very differently to what I imagined.

On the morrow I was pacing up and down the

garden, after a sleepless night, waiting for breakfast. The early regular habits of the farm had been sadly broken in upon by our misfortunes, and my father was listless and lazy now, very different to what he used to be. I was leaning over the gate—the same gate from which so many years ago I had watched poor Sophy's funeral start—when, to my great surprise, I saw Mr. Vere rapidly approaching. He entered the garden and shook hands with me, not at all with a commiserating or melancholy face. I thought it unfeeling of him to look so happy, and said, "Mr. Vere (I could not call that portly clergyman Ernest), "I suppose you have heard of our misfortune."

"I have," he replied, "but hope to hear soon of your good fortune. I fancy this letter does not bring bad news."

And he handed me a letter, sealed with a large black seal, and directed,—

"*Mr. John Aylmer,*
Care of the Rev. Ernest Vere,
Oakwood Rectory, near ——."

It was a lawyer's letter, and informed me that, by the late Mr. Beverley's will, I had become the possessor of several thousand pounds in the funds, and also of his country-house and land, the income of which was about four hundred pounds a year. I was thunderstruck, and turning to Ernest, exclaimed, "Can this be true?"

"Quite true," he replied. "My sister has also received a letter, informing her that she has been

left ten thousand pounds in the funds, besides a certain rent-charge that will make her fortune equal to yours. I had no idea we were all such favourites with the old gentleman, for I thought he had quite given us up; but I find I also am mentioned in the will. He has left me his library, saying that as he knew my uncle had provided for me, he felt he was only fulfilling my wishes by providing for my sister. All the remainder of his fortune is left to endow his hospital for decayed printers. You need have no scruples of conscience on the subject," he continued, seeing me still look doubtful, "for he has only one relation in the world, a cousin, who is richer even than our kind old friend was."

"Who would ever have thought of his leaving anything to me?" I again exclaimed.

"I remember," he replied, "Mr. Beverley once said to me he should like to do something for you. He said he wished you were his son, for you were a lad of spirit, and would some day make a noise in the world."

"And when did you receive the news?" I asked.

"Only just now, by this morning's post; and I came down immediately, thinking that if I did not find you, I should find your father, and lighten his care by telling him of the good fortune of his son."

"Few people are in such a hurry to bring their friends good news," I replied. "If there is anything bad, they run to you fast enough with it."

"That's your uncomfortable way of looking at the world; but we will not talk about that now.

If you have anything to settle in this part of the country, I advise you to see about it, and then go and look at this new property, which I have no doubt would make things all smooth with you."

I knew what he meant, though his way of speaking was so ambiguous. My attachment to Mary was well known in the village.

"You are right," I said. "Will you come in and breakfast with us? and we will tell my father the good news, which I can hardly believe to be true. I have hopes that this sum in the funds will be sufficient to clear him from all his embarrassments, and I am sure the landed property will be ample for Mary and me. Pray do not mention a word of the legacy to any one else, for I wish to see how Mrs. Alton will receive me, now that she believes me to be penniless."

We entered the house, and found my father and mother downstairs. My mother was finding the places for morning prayers, and they were on the point of beginning without me. My father passed the book to Mr. Vere, and motioned him to read. He did so; and the calm of a few minutes' fervent devotion prepared my parents for the great joy that was to follow. I unhesitatingly offered to give up to them the funded property, and they accepted the offer in the same spirit in which it was made. That was one of the few moments of pure, real, heartfelt, and deserved joy, that I have experienced in the course of my life. For once I felt gratitude to Heaven, gratitude that I was enabled to do so much. From the feelings of that moment I can

imagine what the joys of a good man must be. How different was the breakfast of that morning to the supper of the night before! What a glow of gratitude suffused my mother's face as she exclaimed, "I knew those words I showed you would come true; I knew we should never be forsaken!" The idea that he need not leave the old homestead seemed to give new life to my father, his countenance cleared, the wrinkles in his forehead suddenly smoothed; and, turning to me after Mr. Vere left, he lighted his pipe, and said, in his old accustomed manner,—

"Now, my boy, we'll go and have a look at the sheep!"

I was rather impatient at this, for I was longing to be on my way to Little Dale; but I bore the interruption outwardly with a good grace, and wandered about all the morning with him. At twelve he said,—

"Dinner must be ready now; let's go in and see."

I could stand this no longer, so replied, "Thank you, father; I want to be off to Little Dale."

"Little Dale! What can you want there? Oh ay, I forgot."

Forgot? Yes, of course, I thought—old people never do recollect love affairs; they pretend to be entirely ignorant that there are such things in the world, and yet they were in love themselves once. I wondered my father should have no letters to write, considering the change in the aspect of affairs. I knew *I* had; but then I could settle to

nothing until matters were concluded with Mary, I was so anxious to see how Mrs. Alton would receive a ruined man.

"Don't you wish to write and tell the creditors that you are in a position to pay off all claims, for you say you think they cannot exceed the legacy?"

"The lawyer is coming over at four o'clock this afternoon," said my father. "He will be monstrously surprised at the news we shall have to tell him. He'll write all the letters, thank Heaven! that's the only good one ever gets by dealing with those lawyer chaps, they do all the pen and ink work. But I say, Jack, you'd better be back by that time; we shall want you more than anybody. They wont believe a man would give away his money at this rate, unless you tell them so yourself."

It was provoking enough, but I should still have time if I made haste; so, leaving dinner out of the question, I hurriedly set off for Little Dale. It was cold weather, hard and frosty, so my walk did not take me long. There was the same atmosphere of bustle and business round the thrifty Mrs. Alton's farm as there used to be, and there she was herself looking at the turnips that were being chopped up for the sheep, with her bonnet put on her head upright, hind part before, to keep her neck from the wind. She did not look old, but she had never looked young; so there was but little room for a change. Mary was not with her, doubtless she was busy in the house; the mother and daughter were seldom together in the morning,

because Mrs. Alton said people could work better alone, as then there was no temptation to gossip. I should like to have seen Mary first, but I was generally thwarted in this quarter, and I have no doubt this perpetual crossing helped to keep up my attachment for such a length of time. Had all run smooth from the first, I should soon have tired of the idea, especially had George been out of the way. I was timidly approaching Mrs. Alton, when she came forward and greeted me in a heartier manner than she had ever done before. When the first mutual inquiries were over, I said,—

"I suppose, Mrs. Alton, you know how badly things have gone with my father of late?"

"Indeed I do, John, and heartily sorry I was to hear it. I should have gone down to see if I could do anything, but have been so busy of late," (when was she not busy, I wonder?) "and, besides, I did not know whether I might not be better away."

"Well, Mrs. Alton, I wanted to talk to you about Mary. I am of the same mind as I have been all along; but I shall be forced to sell my share of the schooner to help my father, and, of course, I shall be far below what you have a right to expect for your daughter. I doubted whether I ought to come here at all, but I could not resist it."

"And you were right not to try, John. I value money, for there is no getting on without it; but I value honesty more, and I love you for helping your father. You have shown yourself constant and true all this time, and I'll not stand in your way

now that you happen to be unfortunate without any fault of your own. You don't suppose I've been striving and working all my life for myself only, do you?—for if you do, you're very much mistaken. I've been saving for my Mary, that she mayn't have to rough it in the world as her poor mother has; and when I'm under the churchyard grass, she'll have something to look to, for in spite of all my training, she is not one of those who can well take care of themselves."

I was in transports of gratitude, and expressed myself enthusiastically.

"Do not give me credit for more than I deserve," replied Mrs. Alton; "I tell you frankly that I should prefer George Weston for a son-in-law, but Mary does not seem to take to him. Perhaps you stand in his light; if so, you had better go and talk to her, and as she decides so shall it be."

I was hastening to obey her instructions, when she called me back once more, and said,—

"Stop a minute, I have something else to say to you. Remember, if she says yes, you must give up that seafaring life altogether. It would be different if you had a ship of your own; but as it is now, you must be content to remain on dry land, and lead a quiet life. You can take a farm, and I'll stock it for you."

"But I don't know anything about farming; I've forgotten the little I ever learnt."

"Oh, nonsense! I'll manage it for you, or I'll lend you my man Tom Meredith for a bit, and you'll soon learn enough."

Had this conversation taken place before I was aware of Mr. Beverley's legacy, I doubt very much whether I should not have abandoned all thoughts of marrying Mary. To settle down to a quiet farming life! Here would have been an end of all my romance!—no hope of carrying Mary off, and making her a pirate's wife! But as affairs stood now, I accepted the proposal with alacrity. I knew I had it in my power to make her a lady; we should be independent, we might travel, or live at home at ease, or do anything we liked; so I went in search of her joyfully, anticipating the delight of her and her mother when I should disclose my real circumstances. A merry voice singing snatches of a country song soon led me to her I sought. Still the same face, still the same joyful, yet half-serious expression; but the figure and the manner were altered, and the careless, pretty girl had grown into the staid and handsome woman. In spite of this she was still the Mary of my childhood; there was the same kind light in the eyes, the same animated turn of the head, and I approached her with the same brotherly confidence I had always felt towards her. There were none of the tremulous fears, none of the awe and timidity, I had read of as existing generally in the heart of a lover, and for one moment I thought, "Do I really love her? Am I not doing this merely to spite George?" But I turned away from the thought; and, advancing quickly towards her, I asked, as rapidly as I could utter the words,—

"Mary! Mary! I have come back! Do you care for me as much as you did?"

Mary did not like to be startled. She was quiet in her movements, and sudden questions always puzzled her; but I saw that she turned very red, and sat down on the garden-seat near her. She shook hands with me, but said nothing.

"Are you not glad I have come back, dear Mary?" I said, for I was determined to have an answer.

"How very hot it is!" was all the reply. It was quite cold, and the ground was hard with frost.

"I wish your heart was hot," I replied, much hurt. "It seems as cold as ice. I did not expect such a greeting as this after so long an absence."

"Oh, John, how can you say so?" and Mary burst into tears. My sudden appearance and impetuosity had proved too much for her.

I was all remorse in a moment, and applied myself to the sweet task of comforting her. She soon recovered, and listened with interest to all I told her concerning myself and my altered fortunes; and when I had come to the end of my long and vivid harangue, replied,—

"If I cared for you before, John, I care doubly for you now."

"Let me call your mother, Mary; let me call her now quickly, for I have something to tell you both," I exclaimed, hurriedly, for I could no longer defer the pleasure of recounting the good fortune that had befallen me. I had intended to tell it them slowly, making them guess as I went on, and keeping the best part for the last, but now the good news I had been bottling up so long poured out in spite of myself.

I thought Mrs. Alton would have been overwhelmed with joy at her daughter's approaching rise in life; but she did not value the prospect as highly as I expected. I had misjudged her character, and thought her more worldly than she really was.

"I don't know that I am very well pleased," she replied. "I would much rather marry my daughter to a respectable farmer than to a sham gentleman, for a real gentleman you never can be; you weren't born to it, and money makes no difference. I am afraid you'll be setting yourself and Mary up; and if you do, you'll both be set down, sooner or later, you'll see. 'Set up a pinnacle, and people are sure to throw stones at it.' Besides, I'd rather have you near me and poor, than away from me and rich."

"But you shall come, and live with us," I said, "and share all we have."

"That's all very fine talking now, but you'll tell another story by-and-by. Besides, what should I do as a fine lady, I should like to know? No, no; what I was born to, I'll keep to; and 'twould be well if all would follow my example. Mary, have you scoured out those pails yet?"

This was really too bad. To go back to uninteresting domestic details, when such wonderful events as my return and proposal had just taken place! It was not to be borne.

"If you please, Mrs. Alton," I said, with emphasis, "I must request you will allow Mary and

me to be together for an hour. This is surely not much to ask, as we are engaged, and I must be back at my father's by four o'clock."

She looked astonished at my venturing to ask such a thing, but made no objection, and went to the dairy, slamming the door after her, as if she did not approve of it. Mrs. Alton never could be brought to believe that her daughter was more than fifteen! But what did Mary and I care? It was cold; but out of doors we were freer from interruption, so we walked up and down the garden, hand in hand, forming a thousand plans for the future, and indulging in dreams of bliss which were destined never to be realized.

The hour passed quickly, and as we turned to go into the house (for Mary, always conscientious, would not consent to pass the limits of the time allowed us), we came face to face with George Weston, who had entered the garden unobserved by us. He must have seen how it was between Mary and me, for he turned deadly pale, and leant against a tree.

"What's the matter, George?" said Mary, in such an unembarrassed tone that I felt convinced he had never confessed his attachment to her; "what's the matter? Shall I fetch you a glass of water? You have walked too quickly up the hill. What is it? *Do* tell me, George, is there anything the matter at Mr. Weston's?"

"First, tell me," said George, recovering himself, and pointing to me, "are you engaged to that young man?"

It was no time for trifling, and Mary replied, in a low voice,—

"Yes."

"Then," he continued, "there is nothing more to be said. I had come here to ask you to be my wife; I have been silent all these years, because I knew your mother's objection to parting with you; but, I thought, now the time had come, and I was rich enough to place you above want. Till then I would not speak."

I did not interrupt him, for I felt I had gained the victory. There was pity in Mary's face, but there was nothing more.

He went on:—

"As for you, John Aylmer, I cannot blame you. May you be worthy of your good fortune. May you be as kind to her as I would have been, and may you make her as happy as I would have tried to do!"

George was a man of few words, and this was for him an unusually long speech. But it came from his heart; and I, even I, engrossed with my own selfish projects, felt for him. A strange sensation passed over me, and I said to myself, "How is it that I feel no triumph? It is like the day I carried off the prize at school. I know that all the time I am immeasurably his inferior." And what did Mary say to all this? She gave him her hand, and said,—

"Oh, George, I am so sorry. I wish you had not told me."

"I ought to have spared you the pain, and left

you alone in your happiness," said poor George. "I was too selfish; but forgive me; there are some moments when we can hardly control ourselves. Remember both of you, *both* of you," he repeated, looking at me, "that if you ever want a friend, George Weston is the man to come to."

And, without trusting himself to say a word more, he left us both standing there, amazed at the excess of his generosity.

"He is a good man, Mary," I said. "I hope you will never repent the preference you have given to me."

"Never, John," she replied, "as long as you are true."

CHAPTER X.

THE GENERAL'S DAUGHTER.

MATTERS were arranged as satisfactorily as I could have wished. It was found that the legacy I had abandoned to my father would be sufficient to discharge all his liabilities, and that, in the course of time, he would be entirely relieved from his embarrassments. Measures were taken for the apprehension of Dashwood, but without success. No trace could be found either of him or his son. He was too clever to be caught. My father did not show any very great disappointment, for he was not at all vindictive, and would have particularly disliked appearing against the man he had for so many years treated as his friend. He only regretted being obliged to take advantage of my offer, and assured me that nothing should have induced him to do so, had I not also been left the landed property, which would secure a comfortable independence to Mary and myself.

The wedding was to take place in about three months. In the meantime, I was to go to Frampton Wick (the name of my future abode), and get all made ready for the reception of my bride. I was burning with impatience to see this paradise of future delights that I could indeed call my own,

my very own, without interference from anybody. I wanted Mary to come with me; but her mother affirmed that it was against all laws of propriety for her to do so before our wedding. So I had to go alone; for the rest of my family led too busy lives for me to venture to propose such a break in their industrious year. Happy would it have been for me had I prevailed on one of my brothers to accompany me, for then I might have escaped all that afterwards befel me.

Frampton Wick was in one of the prettiest parts of a pretty midland county. The country was thickly wooded all around, and the old gentleman's farmhouse might have been taken for a ranger's lodge in the midst of a forest. It was lonely, quaint, and odd, like himself. The house itself was small, but looked larger than it really was; it presented a front surmounted by three gable ends to the garden side, and the entrance was ornamented by an old porch, having in front over the door a stone escutcheon, with indistinguishable arms (not Mr. Beverley's, for he had none) roughly cut upon it. There was a neatly kept garden, and the farmyard was not close to the house, as in so many old-fashioned farms, but a little way off, and a covered way led to it, so that Mr. Beverley might get there without much trouble in wet weather. The interior was neat and old-fashioned; a passage led through the house from the garden entrance to the porch; a kitchen and dairy on one side, and two sitting-rooms on the other, completed the arrangements on the ground-floor; and on opening

a folding-door in the panelling of the larger room, you discovered an ancient staircase, with heavy balusters of oak, and wide landing-places. I thought this was just the house that would please my father: here was no pretence at gentility, no attempt at elegance, and at the same time no discomfort, and no large unfurnished rooms. Mary, too, would be delighted with it; and I pictured to myself her pleasant face and handsome figure sitting in the deep bay-window, or moving about the house engaged in endless tasks of industry. Yes; a quiet farming life might be no such bad thing after all; and I could leave all business details to the bailiff, who with his wife was residing in the house until I occupied it for good. Then I should be a gentleman, might be made a justice of the peace, perhaps, and carry my head as high as any of the small squires in the neighbourhood. Frampton Wick did not sound gentlemanly enough, I thought. I must change the name, and call it —what? Frampton Hall it could not be, for there was no hall. Frampton Court lay open to the same objection. Frampton House would do; but then there was already a Frampton House, a very grand place, about two miles off, which was inhabited, they told me, by an old general who had returned from India very rich, and now occupied himself by giving excellent dinners, and encouraging everything jovial that was going on in the neighbourhood. He had a handsome daughter too, I was told. He had been married twice, and this was the child of the first marriage, sup-

posed to be a great heiress by all those who did not know that there were two little boys at school in Germany, who were the darlings of their mother, and the torments of everybody else unfortunate enough to come in contact with them. Frampton House would not do, then—but Frampton Lodge should. Yes; I was not going to be Farmer Aylmer, of Frampton Wick, but John Aylmer, Esq., of Frampton Lodge.

Hearing that the general was of a very social disposition, and delighted to make everything agreeable to his neighbours, I imagined it would not be long before I heard something of him. Nor was I mistaken. About the third day after my arrival, on returning from an afternoon walk round my domain, in company with the bailiff, I found a card on the bench in the porch, with "General Faulkner" engraved upon it.

"Miss Faulkner has been here too, sir," simpered the bailiff's wife, delighted to have a piece of news to impart. "They were on horseback, and had two beautiful coach-dogs with them."

"Indeed! And did they ask for me, or did they merely leave the card?"

"Oh, sir, they asked for you; and the general seemed quite vexed that you were out. He inquired whether you were going to stay long in these parts, and said he hoped he should see something of you. And then Miss Faulkner (what a sweet face she has—bless her heart!) admired the thatching of the ricks; and the general shook his head, and said, 'Ah, my poor friend, Beverley! he

was always particular about those ricks; they were his great pride!' And there he was right, sir," digressed the voluble dame, "for my nephew Robert always thatched them; and Mr. Beverley was so pleased with them, that he gave him half-a-sovereign for each rick by way of reward."

I did not want to hear anything about the ricks. My head was full of thoughts concerning my visitors, and I left her in an unceremonious manner, and sat down, musing deeply, in the old chair in the bay-window.

The general evidently intended to treat me as an equal! Why should I tell him that I was only a farmer's son? Let him find it out for himself, if he wanted to know. Mr. Beverley had raised himself from the ranks, and he was considered a gentleman. But I forgot that Mr. Beverley gained respect by not being ashamed of his origin. The next day I went to return the visit. There were no horses at Frampton Wick besides cart-horses, for Mr. Beverley never rode; so I was forced to walk, which I was sorry for, as I should have liked to have made a more imposing appearance. I trudged along the high road for a couple of miles, passing the pretty village of Frampton on my way, and soon came to a square red lodge with white facings, which I knew from description must belong to Frampton House. I was fumbling at the lock of the great iron gates when, attracted by the noise, the lodge-keeper came out.

"Where have I seen that face before?" I muttered, as I looked at him.

He had but one arm; but I knew that scowling, low-browed face, and he apparently knew me, for he gazed long and attentively, and then exclaimed, "Jack Aylmer! How did you come here?"

"How do you know my name? Who are you?"

"Wat Jenkins," he replied; "the boy you thrashed so long ago. Many times I watched for an opportunity to pay off old scores, but none ever came. I'd do it now, if I had both my arms."

"Nonsense!" I replied, for I felt it was of no use to pretend to ignore my old acquaintance—"nonsense to think of old grudges! Here's half-a-sovereign for you, and I'll trouble you not to say here that you know me. I'm a gentleman now, and when you speak of me you must call me Mr. Aylmer."

Wat's eyes twinkled with suppressed merriment in a way I did not like; but he answered,—

"Well, I'm sure I've no wish to remember anything that's disagreeable to a gent; let it drop, then." And at the same time he dropped the money into his pocket.

"How did you lose your arm?" I asked.

"It's a long story," replied Wat. "I've been a soldiering whilst you've been a sailoring, and got knocked over in India, whilst serving under old Brickbat."

"Who's old Brickbat?"

"Don't you know? Old General Faulkner, to be sure. We calls him Brickbat, because his face is the colour of one, and when he's angry, words and blows comes right and left, like so many brick-

bats. He's a main good fellow, for all that; and when a man goes to dine with him, it's seldom he comes out of these here gates sober."

I thought this an odd sign of goodness, and walked on, wondering how my acquaintance with this violent person would progress, when Wat called me back.

"I say, you haven't been a stealing of nothing, have you?"

"No, of course not," I angrily replied.

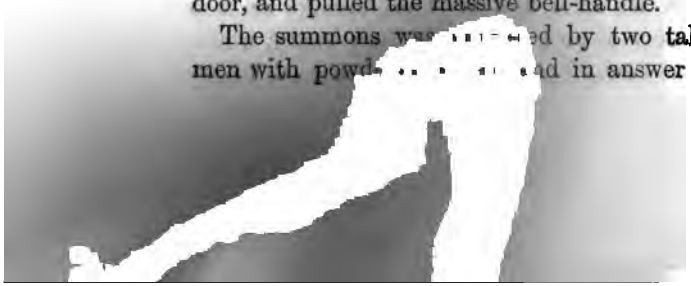
"Oh, well, that's all. I only wanted to know. How's pretty Mary Alton?"

"You needn't speak of her in that way. I'm going to be married to her shortly."

"Oh, you be, be you?" And so this odd conversation ended.

I proceeded on my way through a large flat park-like domain, sprinkled with groups of deer, and adorned with magnificent elms, whose lower branches bowed down to the ground, and then grew up again as if they had been separate trees, and felt a great respect arise in my mind for the owner of so much splendour. I stood before an enormous red brick house, consisting of a front and two wings. It was ugly enough, and the white facings gave it a staring look; but there was an air of opulence about it and its surroundings which impressed me favourably, and even awed me, as I stood upon the broad flight of steps before the door, and pulled the massive bell-handle.

The summons was answered by two tall footmen with powd[illegible] and in answer to my



inquiry, they informed me with great dignity that their master was within. I was ushered through a number of large rooms, and at last entered a library where a florid, stout, little gentleman sat close to a roaring fire, pretending to be reading a newspaper, but, in reality, I believe, from the start he gave, that he had been indulging in a nap that cold afternoon. A stern-looking lady sat near him; she was busy, I imagined, making up accounts, for there were several ominous ruled books open before her, and her countenance wore a puzzled, irritated expression.

In the window a young and beautiful lady stood talking nonsense to a canary bird (how vividly these first impressions rise to my memory!). I knew I stood before General Faulkner, his wife, and daughter.

"Mr. Aylmer!" said the footman, as my eye quickly took in all before it.

The general bustled forward, and held out his hand, nearly stumbling over a footstool as he did so. He looked quite pleased at having any interruption to excite him in the midst of the long domestic winter afternoon.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Aylmer? very glad to see you. Knew your predecessor, poor old Beverley, very well; always had a great respect for him. Fine old fellow! crotchety, though, very; always telling me I did too much for the rich, and not enough for the poor. Ha! ha! ha!"

He introduced me to his wife and daughter, who bowed, the former haughtily, the latter graciously.

I had no occasion to talk much, for the general took entire possession of the conversation. He called me "my dear fellow" directly, pressed me to take refreshment, and, in short, behaved as if he had known me all his life. He questioned me about my native county, was glad to hear my father farmed a great deal (evidently thinking him to be some large landed proprietor), and hoped I should carry on all "old Beverley's plans," as he had been by far the cleverest man in those parts. It was impossible not to be at one's ease with such a gracious old gentleman; and when he asked me to send for my things and stay a few days, "just to get acquainted," as he said, I accepted the offer with thanks. I fancied his wife gave him a frown as he said this, and I fancied also that his daughter's face brightened, as if the introduction of a new element into the family party would not be altogether distasteful to her. There was war between these two—I saw it at a glance. A roving life sets men at ease with one another, and the general and I had been half over the world. He was astonished, he said, at a young man's having travelled so much, and to such out-of-the-way places.

"You must have begun early?"

"At sixteen, sir."

"Dear me! how very singular! And how about your education? Most men's have hardly begun then, unless they are destined for the army. But I suppose you had a clever tutor at home?"

"Yes; a very clever one."

I thought of the rector, and felt I had told the

truth, though not the same truth the general expected.

I spent a pleasant evening, though I heartily wished the general had not stayed so long over his wine. I was anxious to improve my acquaintance with Emmeline, as they called her, whose conversation at dinner had fascinated me. She was beautiful, but not in the same style of beauty as Mary. She was so refined, and her hands had never been made rough with hard work. They had never scoured pails, or churned, or hung out linen to dry. How I wished Mary had been a lady! But then she would have been out of my sphere altogether. Why so? I was a gentleman now, a landed proprietor; I had a perfect right to marry a lady if I chose. These are the reflections in which I indulged whilst the general was dozing over his wine, and when we adjourned to the drawing-room, I sedulously engaged in conversation with the fair object of my admiration. I found her mind as charming as her manners, her speech was full of vivacity, and there was an originality about everything she said which made me linger at her side the whole evening. Nobody seemed to care what we did; the general was asleep in his arm-chair, Mrs. Faulkner was reading, and we were left at liberty to talk as much as we chose. She told me about her rides and her walks, about her pet animals and her garden; and then the conversation diverged to books and music. I had read a great deal in the course of my short and troubled life, and accumulated great stores of mis-

cellaneous information, which often made me seem more learned than those whose reading had not been so desultory. I found, therefore, that I was fully equal to measure minds with this accomplished person; and she, in her turn, seemed delighted to converse with one who cared for something besides the material comforts of this transitory existence. I could tell her, too, of strange and wonderful countries, and kept her entranced by my account of a shipwreck in which I had nearly lost my life. Then she questioned me about my new possessions, and told me many traits of our old friend Beverley, with whom I perceived she had been a great favourite.

"Nine years ago," she said, "he used to be so merry. I was very young then, and I recollect how pleased I always was when he came down from London. He always brought me something pretty, and would laugh, and even sing to me sometimes when we were quite alone. But then all of a sudden he grew very melancholy, even when he was alone with me, and though he got better in a year or two, he never was again the same."

"How old was he when he died?"

"Seventy-six, I believe. People said that nine years before his death he fell in love, which he had never done before, and that then he was refused, and it nearly broke his heart. I dare say it was not true, though; one hears such curious stories about people."

Then she asked me how long I intended to stay

in these parts. I ought to have returned in two or three days; but my new acquaintance promised me so much pleasure, I could not find it in my heart to tear myself away, and so I answered that I had not made up my mind; it depended upon circumstances. I thought it would not be interesting to her to hear of my engagement; she might be asking who Mary was, and other disagreeable questions; and I could not prevail upon myself to face the look of astonishment which would cloud that lovely face when I confessed my real position in life.

"I used often to go to Frampton Wick in Mr. Beverley's time," she said; "he used to lend me his books: such beautiful ones he had, to be sure!"

"Ah!" answered I; "the books are all gone. They were left to a great friend of his, and also a friend of mine, the clergyman who has the care of my native village. But I hope you will come again sometimes, and look about the old place, though there are no books to be seen there at present."

"Thank you; I should like it very much. And how are the carthorses, Diamond, and Emperor, and the Squire? You see I know their names!"

"Quite well, and longing to see you again," I gallantly replied. "And may I hope for your help in choosing a library to replace the one left to my friend?"

She looked pleased at this request, and said she would write out a list of her favourite books on

the morrow. I was sorry when the general woke up with a snort, and said it was time to go to bed. I was haunted by many visions that night—some painful, some pleasant. What was the matter with me? I could not tell. I was certainly not in love with Emmeline; so quickly too after having sought and won Mary; and yet I could not get rid of her image; and dreamt that I had slain Mary in order to marry the general's daughter, and that Wat Jenkins and Miss Clarke were urging on Mrs. Alton to revenge.

I wrote to Mary, and told her that unforeseen and particular business would prevent my return for the present. I said nothing of Frampton Hall or of my new acquaintances; I know not why, but I felt the subject had better be left untouched. Strange that it should have been such an effort to write. Strange that I should be looking out of the window half the time, and longing to join Miss Faulkner, who was wandering about the terrace on the garden-side after our late breakfast. I dated my letter Frampton Wick, to make Mary believe I was engaged in farming business, and then hurried down the stone steps, dashed through the little iron side-gate that led to the garden, and was soon engaged in an animated continuation of the conversation of the previous evening. Soon, however, Miss Faulkner proposed to go indoors.

"What!" I exclaimed; "whilst the sun is shining so brightly?"

"It is too cold to stand about, though the sun is so bright," she replied.

"Let us walk, then," I said. "There is an inviting path leading up that hill; I am sure there must be a beautiful view from it."

"There is," she replied, eagerly. "Are you fond of beautiful scenery?" and encouraged by my warm answer, she ran off into a glowing description of the lions of the neighbourhood. During this walk I committed myself further than I had intended. Flattered by the evident pleasure she took in my society, I allowed her to see that I took equal pleasure in hers. Now that the bloom, the pleasures, and the hopes of youth have all passed away—now that I have little to look back upon, besides a middle age of remorse, and an old age of repentance — I may be allowed, without being accused of vanity, to give a slight description of myself.

At that age, without being positively handsome, I was decidedly good-looking, and in spite of my rough life, had a gentlemanly exterior and refined manners. I was slight and not tall, had a good ear for music and a fine voice, added to which I was fond of talking, and, in general, desirous of winning the good graces of those I was with. The morose feelings from which I had suffered so much in my boyhood had all passed away; I looked upon life with the feelings of an Epicurean, and took every enjoyment as it came, without thinking of aught but the present moment. I was idle too, and my old fancy for thinking and lounging still continued in its pristine vigour.

With all this, it may easily be imagined that a

woman of thought and feeling, and also of great cultivation of mind, should find my company an agreeable change from the society of her father's boon companions. They were all "horse and dog men," as she called them, and she seldom saw any one else, and knew very little of the world. Her father was not a man of cultivated tastes, and could not enter into intellectual enjoyments; her mother was devoted to housekeeping, and her little step-brothers were at school; so her life was often very lonely, and she was reduced to the society of the canary-birds and the dogs. She did not tell me all this; but I saw it—intuitively saw it. I had a great faculty for seeing through domestic politics in a very short time, and was seldom wrong.

We became what I may term "intimate" that morning. Two hours spent alone with a person is a great step towards intimacy.

Frampton Wick was a great subject of conversation between us, and I easily persuaded Emmeline to consent to come over and spend an afternoon there, if her father would join the party.

"But after this magnificent place, how poor and small everything else must seem to you," I said, wishing to find out her ideas upon the subject.

"That is always the way," said Emmeline; "people seem to think that living in great houses spoils one for small ones. Now, *I* think just the contrary; I always admire a small house so very much; there is something so snug and comfortable

about it. I do not think there is half so much happiness in great houses as in small ones."

Her words gave me a thrill of pleasure, and yet all the time I felt like a traitor.

"It must be nearly luncheon time," she said, bringing my thoughts down to a lower level; "let us go home by the lodge." And we followed a path through a plantation, that led us out opposite Wat Jenkins's abode. He opened the gate for us, and gave me an impertinent wink as we passed. What a fool I had been to tell him I was engaged to Mary Alton!

All this time I had no intention of not fulfilling my engagement with Mary. I flattered myself I loved her as much as ever; but my fancy was enthralled by Miss Faulkner, and I could not make up my mind to break through the trammels in which she held me. It was pleasant, too, to be treated by her father as an honoured and intimate guest; and once or twice I could plainly perceive that Mrs. Faulkner encouraged my flirtation with her step-daughter. I saw that she would not be sorry to get rid of her. The general was particularly civil to me, and I lingered on day after day at Frampton House, forgetful that duty called me back to Oakwood. At last the truth slowly forced itself into my mind, and I acknowledged to myself, that since success had crowned my attachment to Mary, I had cooled in my ardour, and that, having defeated George, my principal object was gained. I meant still to be constant and true, but I was in no hurry to return to Little Dale, whilst

there was so much to interest me in the vicinity of Frampton Wick. Mary's answer to my letter expressed astonishment at my having so much business to do, but no doubt of my truth, and entered with her usual minuteness into the detail of her own occupations. But I had no patience now to interest myself in the price of butter, and eggs, and poultry; I was reading poetry with Emmeline. And thus matters went on for weeks; I residing sometimes at the general's, sometimes at the farm, but in the latter case always spending most of the day at Frampton House. We rode nearly every day, and as we passed through the lodge gates I always received an ominous look and a knowing wink from Wat Jenkins. Emmeline evinced a growing interest in everything I said and did, and seemed to wish to talk of my antecedents, which, for many reasons, was highly inconvenient to me. But I put her off with a description of my sister Sophy, of whom I still cherished the fondest recollection, and was gratified and touched by the sympathy my early and never-forgotten grief elicited. I went on day after day, never thinking what was to be the end of all this, and whether I had not made an impression on Emmeline's heart. Thorough selfishness was at the bottom of mine.

Things at last came to a climax in a manner I little expected. There were some family portraits in the dining-room, and one morning at breakfast I asked Miss Faulkner who one of them represented. It was the picture of a tall, dark lady, with a sweet and melancholy countenance. I had

often looked at it, and wondered where I had seen that face before, for I was certain I had seen it. It was a remarkable face, one not to be forgotten. Miss Faulkner lowered her voice, and said,—

"That is a picture of my dear mother; she died very soon after I was born. Her name was Emmeline Woodford."

I started, for I remembered the name and the history recounted long ago to Mary and me in the little white cottage. I thought of the miniature-case our juvenile curiosity had opened. Here was a solution of the mystery.

"What!" I exclaimed, "Miss Clarke's Emmeline."

The general, who was sitting near, overheard us, and unheeding Mrs. Faulkner's grave looks, began talking about his first wife. He had caught the name of Miss Clarke too, and eagerly questioned me about her.

"Miss Clarke, did you say? Do you know her? Anne Clarke, do you mean? Where does she live now?"

I told him, regretting my heedlessness.

Miss Faulkner all the time was utterly at a loss to account for the excitement that followed the mention of that simple name, Anne Clarke. She evidently had never heard it before.

"A very old friend of mine, my dear," explained her father; "a very valuable friend. I lost sight of her many years ago, before I went to India. She was your mother's most intimate friend. You shall write to her, my dear; you shall write to her;

I don't believe she knows there's such a being in existence. When I came back from India she had moved house, and I never could find out where she had gone; I might, perhaps, if I had tried harder; but at that time I had other things to attend to," politely bowing to Mrs. Faulkner, who did not seem at all to appreciate the compliment.

Emmeline eagerly asked for all particulars about Miss Clarke. These her father gave her, omitting, however, the fact of his engagement to her, and accounting for her generosity to him and his first wife, by the great friendship she had for the latter. "That was the beginning of my good fortune," said the general; "for then I had no idea of ever being rich; and since my second marriage (Mrs. Faulkner, I heard afterwards, was a rich widow) I have often thought I ought to repay her in some measure what she then gave us, though the delicacy and kindness with which it was given I never can repay." This then was Miss Clarke's Leonard. His jovial humour and boisterous manners tallied with her description; but the fat red face and stout figure looked very unlike the handsome fair-haired young officer I recollected having seen in the minature. And yet there were traces of resemblance. The blue eyes, the merry mouth, were the same; and hard service, and exposure to sun and wind, together with an over-fondness for the pleasures of the table, might easily have produced the change. Yes; the jovial, rather vulgar General Faulkner might easily have been the handsome Leonard. I mused long over this curious discovery,

and thought how surprised the general would be, could he know how well acquainted I was with one circumstance at least of his early history; and how easily I could enlighten his daughter as to the secret of his friendship for Mary's instructress. I mused long; for I also thought that it might be very inconvenient for me, should there be an intimate communication between my native village and Frampton House. If Miss Faulkner really did write to Miss Clarke, the latter might in her answer allude to the engagement between Mary and me; and also discover to my new friends that my father was not a gentleman. But then, why should I care? I should soon settle with my bride at Frampton Wick, and then the truth would all come out; for of course my relations would visit me; and however refined Mary might be, even if I could make *her* pass as a lady, her mother would soon show herself in her true colours, those of a rough, honest, industrious farmer's wife. Then why delay the revelation? or why pretend at all to be other than what I was? I could give myself no satisfactory answer; but I knew I was unwilling to give up the pleasure of being treated as an equal by my new friends; and Emmeline's society grew daily more delightful to me. What a wife she would make! I often thought; and as weeks rolled on, I regretted more and more my rash engagement. Rash, indeed! Had I not thought of it for years? Had it not been the wish of my childhood? Yes! but the object was attained, and I no longer valued it. I would say nothing,

and let things take their chance. Meantime a tacit understanding seemed to exist between Emmeline and me; and though no word of love had passed our lips, it grew to be a settled thing, that whenever we walked or rode, we were to be allowed to converse together without interruption. Miss Faulkner's curiosity had been much excited by that conversation about her father's old friend; and finding that I knew her, she asked me many questions, and listened with pleasure to the account I gave of Miss Clarke's charitable words and deeds, and the great blessing she was to our neighbourhood. I did not ascertain whether she had written to her yet; and I resolved to drive away the thought from my mind. I rather wondered why the general had told his daughter to write, instead of writing himself; but I observed that Mrs. Faulkner was dreadfully jealous, and I therefore supposed that he was afraid of offending her. In course of time I grew to be rather a favourite of the precise, severe lady of the house. I saw where her weak points lay, and humoured them; was careful never to come into the house with dirty shoes; was always punctual at meals; said it was warm, when she thought it warm, and cold, when she pronounced it to be cold; and once overheard her telling her husband, that I was "a well-behaved, polite young man, having all the gentlemanly manners of the old school;" and he, for his part, was only too glad to find that, at last, one of his favourites was acceptable in her sight. One morning, as we were sitting at breakfast, a

letter was handed to me. The direction was in Mary's handwriting, and I imagined it to be one of her usual warm-hearted, commonplace epistles. I laid it down, therefore, until I had finished an interesting discussion I was having with Emmeline. On turning it over, I saw that it was much shorter than usual; it did not fill two pages. Amazed at this, I unfolded it, and read it in the presence of the three Faulkners. The contents were somewhat as follows:—

"JOHN AYLMER,—

"I once told you, many years ago, that I could not continue to love a person when my respect for his character had ceased. That time has now come between you and me; I can no longer respect you, and therefore all is over between us. My mother thinks it best, and so do I; and I ought to be very thankful that I have found you out in time. And now I will tell you the reason why I think so, though your own conscience will tell you best. You have been away much longer than is necessary. The lawyer told my mother that you had no business at Frampton Wick which could not easily be settled in a day or two; and as for putting the farm to rights, Mr. Beverley left everything in the most perfect order. Then your letters have been short and cold, as if other things filled your mind, and you have made no mention of the new friends who are now so kind to you. I hear one of them is a beautiful young lady, and that she rides and walks with you every day. I hear that your mar-

riage is talked of in the village of Frampton, and you must have given cause to these reports. Why did you not tell me anything about Frampton House? You must have thought you were doing wrong, or you would not have been so silent. This is the last letter I shall write to you; and you can never accuse me of inconstancy, for I have been true to you for many, many years. John Aylmer, I remember, when we were both children, we saw a water-lily growing in a pond. I remember how you wished for it, and how we stayed half an hour by that pond, trying to get the flower. You nearly drowned yourself, but at last you gained it, and carried it with you for some minutes, and then you threw it over the hedge. I remember I asked you why you did so, when you had been so long and had taken so much trouble in getting it; and then you said to me, 'Mary, the difficulty was the pleasure. I have got it, so I do not care about it now.' I think now I am like that water-lily.

"I hope you will be happy with the young lady you are trying to gain; she will be more fit for you in your new position than I should have been. If you fail with her, perhaps you will try to come back to me; but, to prevent anything of the kind, I tell you that I can never again look upon you as I once did.

"MARY ALTON."

I do not know what the Faulkners thought of me whilst I was reading this letter. I turned red and pale by turns.

"Any bad news?" asked Emmeline, kindly.

"Oh no! nothing to signify, only something that rather surprised me," I answered, crumpling up the letter in my hand. I escaped as soon as I could, and went to my own room to consider what I should do next. I felt so angry and hurt at Mary's rejection, though conscious that I fully deserved it, that I did not even dream of trying to change her determination, but in haste wrote an angry note, of which I afterwards bitterly repented.

"DEAR MARY,—

"Since you cannot trust me by myself for six weeks, it is better that our engagement should be broken. You would not wish to marry a man in whom you have so little confidence. Jealousy would be the continual torment of our married life. Your miserable and injured

"JOHN AYLMER."

After this hasty proceeding I went out, and walked up and down the terrace to cool my fevered brow, and try to realize the position in which I found myself. I did not condemn myself, but I condemned Mary. Why be so hasty? Why not give me an opportunity of justifying myself? I thought and thought, until I really fancied myself the injured one. Was this the return after my years and years of silent waiting? To cast me off on the slightest suspicion! To disbelieve my statement that business kept me still at Frampton Wick! What business had she to believe anybody

else? But she should find I was not to be made miserable by her rejection. I would court Emmeline in good earnest; there was no reason why I should not win her; she evidently regarded me with favour; and hers was just the imaginative, spirited mind I loved to consort with. I should be acting quite fairly, for had not Mary herself broken the tie that bound me to her? I was free now; I could do as I pleased. There was delight in this thought. But then came recollections of our childish days, of long walks and conversations, of happy anticipations and mutual sympathies; were these all to be given up in one moment? Yes, they must, they should; and a new era in my life should begin. I by no means overlooked the worldly advantages which would accrue to me from a connexion with the Faulkners. Emmeline, as the only daughter, doubtless possessed a considerable fortune; and my marriage with her would raise me at once to the level of county society. Neither of these considerations were to be despised. I made up my mind, I would woo and win Emmeline in right earnest; and what I began for amusement should be continued with all the energy of which I was capable. Why should I not put the question to-day? The sooner the better, in case she might accidentally learn the fact of my former engagement. Whilst I thus decided, the subject of my thoughts appeared at the gate which led to the garden. "The Fates be propitious!" I thought, as I advanced to meet her. I was always very quick about a thing when I had once made up my mind

to do it, and there was something in her eyes this morning—a soft, almost tender expression—which gave me much encouragement. I can shut my eyes now, and bring that whole scene before me—The long terrace, with steps down into a lower garden; the winter sun making the hoar frost sparkle; Emmeline advancing towards me with a piece of bread in her hand, with which she was trying to entice a robin redbreast near her; the mist over the hills vanishing gradually, and bringing to view the church tower rising out of the woods—I can see it all clearly, distinctly, as I can recal so many other scenes of vanished happiness and departed hopes! I forgot the double game I had been playing; I forgot everything but the present moment; and excited to the utmost pitch, I acknowledged my hopes, and entreated their fulfilment. Emmeline did not seem surprised, but she was agitated, and it was some moments before she could answer me calmly.

"If you are sure I can make you happy," at length she replied.

"Sure!" I exclaimed, in ecstasies. "With you, this world would be a Paradise, a Garden of Eden, a——"

I was always flowery in my language, and I know not what more nonsense I talked. Emmeline made her acceptance conditional; it was to be, if her father approved; not unless. I might ask him as soon as I pleased.

"Then let it be to-morrow, dear Emmeline; let us have one day, at least, free from business, in

which we may indulge only in bright dreams, without anything to bring us down to the realities of life."

Emmeline looked rather astonished, but consented to my request. I was puzzled; for I knew the next step would be hateful explanations, and still more hateful settlements. But once secure of Emmeline's affection, I thought all these difficulties would be overcome; for I was certainly a great favourite with the father, and the stepmother would not be likely to throw any obstacles in my way.

That day was passed in perfect bliss. Now and then, indeed, suggestions of conscience would make themselves heard; but I stifled them directly, by repeating to myself parts of Mary's bitter letter, as I deemed it, and working myself up to the highest pitch of indignation against her for her mistrust. That afternoon, Emmeline, the general, and I rode over to Frampton Wick. Whilst the general, who was fond of farming, discoursed in the yard with the bailiff, who was only too glad to converse with some one who took a real interest in agricultural details, I enticed Miss Faulkner into the house, and examined the rooms with her, settling which were to be refurnished, and with what colours. It was very foolish to talk in this manner until I knew what the amount of her fortune was to be, for my own would certainly not justify such an outlay. Four hundred a year, though affluence to Mary and me, would doubtless seem very like poverty to a young lady accustomed to live in the

splendid style of Frampton House. But there was no need to think of explanations until the morrow; and so we looked at the two sitting-rooms, and settled which was to be the drawing-room and which the dining-room, and where the books (chosen by Emmeline) were to be put, and settled to have a shelf made here and a cabinet there, and to have Emmeline's escritoire and work-table placed in the bay-window, whence she could see the garden, and the cows in the meadow beyond.

"I fear you will not like such a busy life," I said; "you will have to give out everything and superintend everything, and, in short, be the right hand of the place. You do not know how hard the multifarious duties of a farmer's wife are."

"The harder the better," she replied. "I am tired to death of having nothing to do. I long to feel myself necessary to some one or something, and quite enjoy the idea of everything going wrong unless I looked after it. Now, at home all goes on like clockwork, without any trouble. I am quite tired of breakfast, and luncheon, and dinner, all coming so punctually, and often envy those who have nothing to eat until they have worked for it."

"But you would not like to have such rough hands as they have," I said, smilingly, taking hers in mine.

"Better to have rough and useful hands than smooth and idle ones," she answered. "Now, is not that like one of the speeches your good friend, Miss Clarke, would make?"

"Very," I answered. "I think you two would suit each other admirably."

"Did I ever tell you," continued Emmeline, "that I wrote to that excellent lady, some days ago, and mentioned you in the letter? I expected an answer before this; perhaps I shall get one to-morrow. But you do not look pleased. How odd! I thought you would be delighted at the idea of our making friends."

"So I am," I said, trying to chase the clouds from my brow, but with doubtful success. "It was kind of you to think of it."

"Not at all. My father made me. I hate writing letters, and cannot think why he could not have written himself. One thing is, he is mortally afraid of mamma; and if she were to see a letter in his handwriting directed to a lady, neither he nor I should ever hear the last of it; we should never *see* the last of it rather, for mamma seldom scolds; but she has a dreadful way of looking as black as a thunder-cloud, and keeping very quiet, which is worse than getting into a passion."

I knew the way she meant, for I had already seen occasional symptoms of it. By this time the general had rejoined us, and entertained us with a running commentary on what he had seen.

"Never saw things in better order, Aylmer; that man of yours deserves great credit. Only go on in the same way, and you'll have one of the best farms in the county. If I were you, I'd get more cows, and make it as much of a dairy-farm as possible. Capital pastures, capital! Pity to

plough such land; and you'd always get a market for butter and cream down at Stapleton. Butter eighteen pence a pound, your man tells me; very dear, very; get ours for sixteen."

Poor old general! he always fancied he knew everything, whilst I was fully aware, from Mrs. Faulkner's economical complaints, that the butter he consumed was at that time twenty pence a pound. But I did not contradict him; and, if I had, it would have been of little use, for he always held firm to his own opinion.

Our ride home was delightful, for the general had to go a mile or two round to see a brother magistrate about some poaching business, and Emmeline and I were left together. That evening, too, was delightful, for we sang together, we read together, and stood in the embrasure of the window watching the cold frosty moonlight, and forming plans for the future; she calm in her anticipations of happiness, I with my suspicions and fears all laid to sleep for the present, and little dreaming of the rude shock I was to experience on the morrow.

CHAPTER XI.

DISCOVERIES.

"HERE'S a letter for you in a strange writing," said the general, as he handed to his daughter a neatly-folded missive, when we were all sitting at breakfast the morning after my hopes had been realized. "You have not many correspondents, but I never saw this hand before."

"A bill, most likely," said Mrs. Faulkner, who was always certain to make some disagreeable remark. "Emmeline has been dreadfully extravagant in her dress lately."

"Wrong!" replied Miss Faulkner, with a merry glance at me. "I know the writing of all my creditors. Don't you remember, papa, telling me to write to Miss Clarke? This must be her answer; I expected it long ago."

"Better not open it now," said I, who was beginning to feel very nervous as to what the contents might be. "Will you not eat some breakfast first?"

"No, no; I am longing to see what the dear old lady says; and besides, my curiosity is raised, for you looked so cross when I told you yesterday I had written to her, that I begin to think you have some secret reason for disliking us to correspond.

Strange, too, after your praise of her! But," said Emmeline, lowering her voice, so that no one but myself could hear, "perhaps she is an old love of yours, or perhaps she could reveal some passages of your life with which you would rather I should not be acquainted."

I knew Emmeline was only in joke, but this came terribly near the truth. After all, though, Miss Clarke might not mention my name, and if she did, might not reveal anything that would displease Emmeline. How foolish I was to make myself so nervous about every little thing!

Emmeline opened the letter; but as she read it, her countenance changed, her eyes sparkled with anger, and she threw it to me, exclaiming,—

"There! what have you to say to that?"

"Bless me! my dear, what's the matter?" said the astonished general.

"Emmeline, I wish you would not be so noisy and vehement," said the step-mother. "It is very unladylike, and does a great deal of harm to my nerves so early in the morning."

Emmeline did not answer them, but sat still, with her flashing eyes fixed upon me.

I read the letter, and burned with rage as I did so.

This was the sense of it:—

"DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,—

"(For such I may call you, though I have never seen you.) It was kind of you to think of me, and I thank you much for your letter. You were right

in your surmise that I did not know your dear mother had left a daughter. It would please me greatly could I induce you some day to come and pay me a visit in my quiet little home. Pray tell your father that I have not forgotten our old friendship, and that I was glad to hear of his good health. It is kind of him and you to take so much notice of John Aylmer. He is a respectable young man, and would do well were he a little steadier. Old Farmer Aylmer was much hurt at his not taking to the farm more; but he has got on well, they tell me, in the merchant service, and is engaged to be married to a good, steady young woman in this neighbourhood, which I hope will sober him down. Her name is Mary Alton; and I thought when I saw her last, that she was rather hurt at his staying away so long. Perhaps you might give him a hint of this, as I should be sorry for things to go wrong between those two.

"I hope I shall hear from you again, when you are at leisure.

"Give my compliments to the general, and Mrs. Faulkner, and think of me ever as

"Your old friend,

"ANNE CLARKE."

When I had finished it, I turned and looked at Emmeline. I shall never forget the expression of her face; scorn, bitter scorn, was written there. There was no pity; nothing but withering contempt.

"Is that true?" she exclaimed, fixing her eyes

on me again, as if to read every movement of my face. The general and his wife looked on amazed.

I had no time to concoct a lie that would bear any appearance of probability, so sat silent—coldly, cruelly silent—when internally I was burning with shame and rage.

"I must go to Frampton Wick to-day," I at last managed to articulate; "I have business there." And so rose and left the table.

I sat down in my own room to think. After all, my situation might not be so bad as I imagined. I could easily explain this matter, when I had had time to think it over. Emmeline would have cooled down by dinner-time, and might be inclined to listen to explanations. She would, like most women, believe what she wished; and I would tell her that this was a previous flirtation of years ago; a mere boy-and-girl attachment; silly, but without any harm in it; that the old people talked about it, as they always did about everything; that Mary might have fancied me, perhaps, but that there were several people in her own station of life, either one of whom would make her a much more suitable husband than I should; that it was much kinder to leave her where she was, &c. &c. No sooner had I made up this pretty story than I prepared to spend the day out at Frampton Wick, and was just going downstairs, when a knock at my door made me turn back. One of the tall powdered footmen was standing there; he had come up the back way, doubtless, with a message for me.

"What's the matter, James?" I called out.

"The general-wants-to-speak-to-you-in-the-library-please-sir-before-you-go-out," said he, as if the sentence were all in one long word.

"Very well." And I went downstairs, wondering what it could be about. I was soon put out of suspense. The general was standing before the fire, looking very hot and excited. He held a large horsewhip in his hand, and was playing with the lash of it. He turned to me with fiery eyes, and said, so fast that the words seemed to choke him,—

"So, sir, a very pretty game you've been playing! This is the way you return my hospitality! Don't say a word; hear what I've got to say to you—I didn't send for you that you might talk to me, but that I might talk to you. So, it's a good thing to have two strings to your bow, is it? You must go and pass yourself off as a gentleman, and make love to my daughter, and then make her promise not to tell her father until *you* choose to give her leave, must you? And all the time engaged to some poor fool of a country girl, who is mad enough to trust to you. You needn't deny it, for I know all about it; and if you were a gentleman, I'd call you out and shoot you dead, sir! But you're not worthy of the honour, sir. I wish this was anybody else's house, sir, that I might horsewhip you as you deserve; and I've brought this," pointing to the whip he held, "that you may take warning; for I warn you, if I ever meet you anywhere out of my own grounds, I'll thrash you until I break every bone in your deceitful body. Don't answer

me, sir; but go along, get out!" he shouted, smacking his whip, "and thank Providence that you have got off so well; for if I catch you on the premises half an hour longer, I'll get William and Dick and Harry to throw you into the horsepond."

I have not written down the oaths with which the old general seasoned his violent speech. His language was by no means choice; and as he held the door open for me, making his whip resound with a loud crack behind me, I bounded up the stairs, thankful to escape from his presence with a whole skin. I clearly inferred from his language that I was never to see Emmeline again. She must have told her father everything, and this was the result of their consultation. I had no means of sending a message to her; and if I had, it would probably not change her determination, whatever that might be. Fool that I was, to have betrayed myself by my unwise allusion to Miss Clarke! But for that, all communication between Frampton and my early home might have been avoided, and all acknowledgment of my real station put off, at least till after the marriage. Then they might storm and rave as they pleased; but it would be their interest to make the best of it. I had ruined all by my own carelessness. As I thought over matters, I wondered more and more who could have told Mary of my late proceedings. We had no mutual acquaintance in this county; if Frampton had been in the next parish to Little Dale, or even in the same county, rumours might easily have reached her; but as matters stood, it

was a perfect mystery to me. The only person I could suspect was Wat Jenkins, and him I had bribed. I resolved to tax him with it as I passed the lodge, and if he could not clear himself, my vengeance should be terrible. These were the uneasy thoughts that passed through my mind as I hurriedly and angrily packed up my things, and made ready for my final departure. I saw no one as I passed down the staircase and along the terrace. I stealthily peeped into the drawing-room, hoping that Emmeline might be there alone, and afford me an opportunity of exculpating myself; but the room was empty. There was no one in the great hall, and no one on the terrace, and I was forced to leave the house ignominiously, carrying my own luggage, without saying farewell to any of its inmates. As I approached the lodge, Wat Jenkins was leaning over the gate. I thought he looked at me with a malicious, laughing sneer; and rendered doubly angry by the thought, I abruptly stopped before the garden paling, and taxed him with his treachery.

"Well, all's blown, is it?" said he, when he had coolly heard me to the end. "It worn't me."

"That remains to be proved," said I; "you are the only person in this place that knows me, or that I belong to Oakwood."

"I never says nothing to nobody," he answered. "I can't be in two places at once; and how could I be down at Oakwood, when I've been a-opening the gate every day for you, and that'ar young woman you've been and took in so?"

Of course not. In my rage I had forgotten that every day he had been there to open the gate, and watch Emmeline and me as we came in from our walks and rides. But another idea struck me.

"You might not have left this place; but you might easily have written any information to Little Dale."

"*I* write? Lor' bless you, I never learned."

"That may be a lie, for aught I know."

"I never tells lies, except when necessary; and if yer likes to thrash me, here I am; I've only got one arm."

This appeal was irresistible; but I continued for some time questioning him. I pretty well satisfied myself that he had had no hand in the affair; but he evidently grew very tired of my suspicions, and suddenly called out, "I say, thar's old Brickbat coming up the ride on the old grey 'oss." Without turning to see whether this was a trick to get rid of me, or not, I was off immediately; for I had no wish to be caught by the general in the act of parleying with one of his servants.

My bailiff and his wife were much astonished when, on reaching home, I announced to them my intention of leaving the place immediately, and of not returning for some time.

"Dear me, sir," said the latter, in her simpering way, "I thought you were going to bring us a nice lady here soon. I've been clearing out the room over the porch, which is the sunniest in the house; and Robert has been putting what always used to

be called, 'The Lady's Plot,' in order, in case Miss Faulkner might have a taste for flowers, and——"

"Silence, woman!" I shouted, in a rage. "I am in no humour for your tittle tattle; tell your husband to come here directly, and do you go and get me a glass of beer, if you can do anything else but talk."

"Well, I'm sure!" the industrious woman muttered; but, fully aware of her innocence, she left my calumnies unanswered, and proceeded to obey my instructions. My arrangements were quickly made; and before many hours were passed, I was on my road to Oakwood, determined to try and see Mary once more, and persuade her that my flirtation with Emmeline had been exaggerated, and that necessary business really had been the cause of my delay. Judging from the former strength of her affection toward me, I imagined that when her first anger had passed away, she would regret having written that bitter letter, and be only too glad to have me back again. It was all very well for her to say that my return would be of no use; wait until I could see her and talk her over! I flattered myself I could talk any one over; I should have managed the old general in a few minutes, if he would only have allowed me to speak. I only wanted time to arrange my ideas; and that I should have during the journey. I wondered more and more how Mary could have got notice of my proceedings; and still my suspicions rested on Jenkins. His face looked so truthful, though, whilst he declared his innocence;

and I remembered, that of old it had been found utterly impossible to teach him to write; and he was not a man likely to have learnt when arrived at years of discretion. But in spite of all this, there was an evident pleasure taken by him in my defeat; and I remembered as I passed through the gate, I heard a low, malicious chuckle behind me, as if some evil spirit were rejoicing at my misfortunes. After raising my hopes so high, and so nearly succeeding in marrying the general's daughter, it may be thought strange that I should have gone back to my early attachment; but it must be remembered, that the cause of my inconstancy was removed; I no longer beheld the being who had so unconsciously induced me to stray from the path of duty, and, therefore, my feelings returned to their accustomed channels. I thought to myself, "I dare say Mary is now pining for my return, poor soul; I must go and console her; she has doubtless bitterly repented of her hasty rejection." There was an additional motive too in my wishing to return. Whenever my self-esteem was wounded in one quarter, I always longed to have it smoothed down in another. When I was a boy, this feeling led me to seek poor Jane's cottage, whenever my conceit had been ruffled by my father or the rector; and now that I had been, as I imagined, grossly insulted by the general, and, besides that, did not feel at all comfortable in my own conscience, I wanted to convince Mary, and thereby convince myself, that I had not done anything so very unpardonable. With my mind en-

grossed by these reflections, I journeyed down to my native place. I had always been devoted to the study of character, and was easily amused and occupied by the conversation of fellow-travellers; my wandering habits and the pleasure I took in everything novel made me ready to afford my sympathies to any one who chose to ask for them; but during this journey I was entirely self-occupied, and wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the past and the anticipations of the future. I noticed neither inside nor outside passengers; I knew not who entered or who left the coach. I entered into conversation with no one, and hardly answered the observations that were casually addressed to me. The towns we passed through were utterly uninteresting to me; and when we stopped to dine, I was quite unable to bear the clatter of tongues and the odour of smoking viands, so precipitately fled from the crowded merry travellers' room, and took refuge in the churchyard surrounding an ancient grey cathedral-looking edifice that reared its solemn tower in the midst of the town. A burial-place was my rest for a short time, a fitting place for me just then, I thought; and for a moment I felt the angry, restless course of my reflections changed into one of comparative peace. It was a cold winter afternoon; I heeded not the cold, but sat there, only too glad to be alone and quiet.

Presently I heard low, solemn sounds inside the church. I drew nearer to the door, and listened. The evening service was beginning, for it was one of those ecclesiastical buildings where religion

reigns every day, instead of only on one day in the week. I was fond sometimes of religious impressions, especially when I was sad. I liked them to come upon me of themselves, however; I could not be at the trouble of searching for them, nursing them, encouraging them; and now, as I stood at the door of the grey old edifice, and heard the pealing organ accompanying the beautiful canticle, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," I only wished it were possible to take the words to myself, and in reality to depart out of this troublesome world. But I could not trust myself to remain and face the people coming out of church, so was obliged to cut short that quiet time of rest, and join the knot of passengers before the inn-door. The remainder of the journey was spent by me in the same state of utter indifference to all outward things; and by the time I reached my home I was in a state of great despondency; for my hopes had fallen as the night closed in, and the darkness that reigned over all outward things seemed to weigh down my soul with its gloomy influence.

"Well, John, a pretty mess you've made of it," said my father, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. I knew he was angry, for he generally called me Jack.

"Where's my mother?" was all the reply I vouchsafed, for melancholy with me always turned to sullenness.

"Gone to bed. I expected you'd come home to try and put things straight with Mary directly you

heard she was off; that's the way with you restless chaps, you always want a thing directly you can't get it. Your mother, too, thought you'd be home to-night; indeed, she rather expected you yesterday, and your old room's ready for you; but I wouldn't let her sit up for you. I told her you weren't worth it."

"I should like to know, sir," I replied, "who has been taking away my character, and turning my friends and relations into enemies."

"Well, Jack, I'll tell you," said my father, more kindly; "it's hard a man shouldn't have an opportunity of speaking in his own defence. You remember our maid Betsy, who married that old enemy of yours, Wat Jenkins?"

"I do," I replied; and a new light began to dawn upon me. "And I know Wat Jenkins is settled at the lodge belonging to Frampton House."

"Very well. This woman came down a few days ago into this country to see her old friends, and she brought with her wonderful stories of the way you were going on with the grand young lady at Frampton House. She said that your approaching marriage was the talk of all the servants, and that you rode and walked with her every day, and, in short, you were always together. Mary and all of us would not believe this at first; but she had picked up this bit of writing in the conservatory at Frampton House one day when she was had in to wash or sweep the place, and she produced it as proof that what she had said was true."

My father handed me a piece of paper, much defaced with dirt, and on it I was horrified to find some foolish verses I had addressed to Emmeline, and left in the conservatory one morning, hoping she would find them when she made her early inspection of her favourite flowers. They were headed and signed, so there was no doubt to whom they were addressed, or who they were by. I recollected that the day I had placed them there I wondered much why Emmeline had not mentioned them. How little I guessed into whose hands they had fallen! She had no doubt shown them to her husband, and he had instructed her to keep them, in case they might be useful against his old enemy. Wat was truthful to the letter; he had neither talked nor written about me, but he had allowed and probably instigated his wife to do so.

"And you have all encouraged this miserable talebearer?" asked I, reproachfully.

"What could I do, John?" replied my father. "We all knew your handwriting. Mrs. Alton came down here in a towering rage, with this paper in her hand. I tried in vain to pacify her, by saying it was most likely a youthful indiscretion, which you would bitterly repent of; but she declared Mary should never set eyes upon you again. You'd better go up there and try to change her determination to-morrow; but I warn you, you'll find it very difficult. But mark my words, if there is really anything going on between you and that Miss Faulkner, which I should be truly sorry for, having always tried to make you

keep in your own station—I say, if there is anything, just confess it at once, and give up Mary."

From this it was evident that my father had not heard of the letter I had written to Mary, acquiescing in her rejection; and I resolved not to tell him, for of course it would bring on the inquiry, why had I written in such a hurry? why had I not come to Oakwood first? and then I should have to explain the ambitious projects I had indulged in, and lose my father's esteem entirely. I did not see my mother till next morning; she was as angry as it was in her nature to be, for Mary was a great favourite of hers, and she had looked forward to my marriage with her as the greatest good that could possibly befal me. It was with the greatest difficulty I could pacify her; she cross-questioned me minutely; and I found it hard to answer her inquiries as to the manner in which I had spent my time during my stay at Frampton Wick. I could not deny that I had been much with the Faulkners; and she with a mother's penetration soon saw how matters were, and upbraided me with my treachery. "These may be very fine ways for gentlefolks," she said, "but I am a great deal too old-fashioned to be pleased with such doings; you ought to be ashamed of them: what have people like us to look to, if we lose our character for good and upright dealings?" I assented to all she said, and told her I was going up to Little Dale that morning, to make my peace. She sent me off with her blessing, and said she wished I might succeed, but for her part she

doubted it; Mrs. Alton was much enraged against me, and no wonder. For my part, I had not much doubt about it; my hopes had sprung up again with the light of the morning, and I imagined the constancy of years would be counted against a momentary dereliction from duty. Mary was so forgiving; she could not, I was certain, be hard upon me; and she was too old now to be coerced by her mother. A dead silence reigned around Little Dale as I approached it, and I saw no sign of Mary or of her mother anywhere. Perhaps they had taken to dine earlier, I thought, this cold, dark weather; twelve was their usual time, but it would be very like Mrs. Alton to hurry the daily routine, in order to get her multifarious business over before the twilight fell. I hammered at the door just as I had hammered at it the afternoon I first made Mary's acquaintance; and my thoughts went back to the eventful time when I had seen her stamping about the garden. Little did I know then, how much we should have to do with each other's fate. I stopped the noise I was making, and looked round for a moment, trying to recal that scene. I could hardly believe that so many years had passed over my head, for time had left little mark upon the peaceful house and its surroundings. The shrubs and trees were higher, it was true, and the thatch was dark and mossgrown, but all else was the same in outward appearance; and everything on the neat premises being kept in a state of constant repair, nothing showed the ravages of years.

No one answered my repeated summons. En-

raged at the delay, I knocked louder and louder. Presently a window in the lower story opened, and a head appeared, which I recognised as that of Mrs. Alton.

"Go away, John Aylmer; I wonder you are not ashamed to come here; go away directly."

This was the greeting I received. Mrs. Alton's face was pale, and her eyes showed traces of tears. It must have been no ordinary cause of grief that could move her thus.

"Go away, John Aylmer," she said again. "I warn you not to come near me. Go away, you have no business in a place where you have done so much mischief."

"Come down, ma'am," I replied, "and hear what I have to say."

"I don't wish to hear anything either from you or about you," was the answer, and she was just closing the window, when I shouted as a last chance,—

"Where is Mary? I *will* see Mary."

"You will have to walk a long way then," said the implacable Mrs. Alton. "Mary is far enough out of your reach—she is with my relations in the north, and wont be back here again for many a month."

Staggered at this news, I again entreated her to come down. "I wish to explain my conduct; I wish to justify myself in your eyes; believe me, I can explain everything." I was so self-deceived, I really thought I could at the time.

The window closed, and I heard Mrs. Alton's

feet pattering down the stairs in her usual quick manner. I thought she had relented, and was mentally congratulating myself on my success, when the door flew suddenly open, and discovered the enraged mother with a shovelful of red-hot coals.

"Now, John Aylmer, will you go?" she exclaimed, menacing me with it. "You will have all this in your face, if you stay here one moment longer. Off with you this minute, or——"

I did not stay to hear the rest. I remembered the rake, and saw from whom Mary inherited the fiery disposition of her childhood. Mrs. Alton pursued me to the gate, uttering threats and abuse in a tone loud enough to be heard by half the parish. To add to my discomfiture, Miss Clarke happened to be taking advantage of the field-path at the bottom of the hill, and must have witnessed the whole scene. She was watching me with a face of amusement, most provoking to one endowed with a keen sense of the ridiculous.

"Do not run so fast, John," she said; "there is no occasion; I have seen it all. You had better walk on quietly with me, and that will give you time to compose yourself. You know I am not a great talker."

I was not pleased at being alone with one I reckoned my enemy, since the memorable letter to Emmeline, which had decided my fate in that quarter. I longed to reproach her for having ruined my prospects, but could not do so without betraying my double engagement, with which at

present she was unacquainted; and I doubted whether Emmeline's sense of dignity would ever allow her to make the circumstance known, even if she became very intimate with the old lady.

"So, John," she continued, for she still addressed me by my Christian name, "you have been left a nice little estate, I hear. I hope you intend to make a good use of it."

"I shall sell the place, ma'am, as soon as I can find a purchaser," was my discouraging answer. "It does not suit me at all."

"Indeed! I am sorry to hear that. I trusted to have heard you were comfortably settled there in a short time. Oh, John, what could have made you throw away your happiness in the manner you have done?"

"In what manner?" said I, pretending not to understand her.

"You know very well; but I see you do not wish to talk of it. Let us change the subject."

"Willingly," I replied; and with a strong effort I controlled myself, and began talking of Frampton, in order to show that I felt no embarrassment at the mention of the name of Faulkner.

Miss Clarke asked many questions about Emmeline, and I was enabled to answer them without betraying any emotion, for my disgraceful dismissal had roused all the pride of my nature, and prevented my feeling as much as I should otherwise.

"How odd that you should never have known that your friend had left a daughter."

"It may seem so to you; but, in reality, it was not so. Soldiers lead a roving life, and I had little correspondence with Mrs. Faulkner after her marriage. This daughter was the youngest of their children. All the rest died, and she was born many years after. But tell me, have you not been to see the rector since your return? He is getting very infirm, and I fear we shall not keep the good old man amongst us much longer. Mr. Vere is like a son to him, and does his part in the parish well and faithfully; but I cannot help being unhappy when I think how soon, in all probability, he will have to succeed him entirely. Come with me to the rectory; it will not take you far out of your way; and it is a pretty sight to see the whole family together."

I felt that this was a delicate artifice to make it appear as if I had voluntarily paid this mark of respect to my old friends; and though I did not relish the idea of encountering the inquiring glances of the rector and his nephew so soon after my rupture with Mary, I felt myself obliged to follow her suggestion. My character had much deteriorated, and the simple scenes that once gave me a momentary pleasure had now lost all their charms. I knew that the atmosphere of the rectory was no place for such as I; I knew that I had no longer anything in common with its inmates; and therefore I would gladly have avoided them altogether. My only wish now was to leave the village as soon as possible, and seek for happiness amongst new scenes of excitement.

The warm welcome that seemed everywhere to greet Miss Clarke was doubly warm at the rectory, and I could see at a glance that she was a valued addition to the happy circle assembled there. Ernest was seated at a writing-table near the window, apparently deep in the preparation of a sermon; Florence, with features still pensive but no longer stern, was engrossed in the superintendence of a tiny class, consisting of two bright-haired little girls; whilst their mother, as beautiful and cheerful as ever, was conversing with the aged Mrs. Vere about some matter concerning the health and welfare of the parishioners; and the old rector, resting his white head upon his hand, had fallen into a doze over one of his beloved quaint-looking volumes.

At our entrance they all quickly rose.

"Surely you have not forgotten your old acquaintance John Aylmer?" said Miss Clarke, as they pressed forward to greet her arrival, too much engrossed with her to pay attention to me.

There was no sign of censure or mistrust on Ernest's open face as he turned to shake hands with me, and the younger Mrs. Vere expressed in animated terms her pleasure at seeing me once more. The children were desired to come forward and show themselves.

"Is that a good man, papa?" asked one who had laughing blue eyes, the image of her mother's; at the same time hiding her face on her father's shoulder, as if she thought the answer would be unfavourable.

"I hope so, my dear. But why do you ask?"

"Because he looks as if he had been put in the corner."

This quite upset any gravity or formality that might be still remaining, and the rest of our interview was as unrestrained as our intercourse of years ago. I looked towards the rector, who had not moved from his chair, but, in answer to my glance, Ernest whispered,—

"Better not disturb him; he is not well to-day. Sometimes he falls into a stupor, and does not speak for hours. He is very infirm, and often seems unconscious of what goes on around him."

He changed the subject, which brought a shade of melancholy over his countenance; began talking of my concerns; and soon became deeply interested in the accounts I gave him of my nautical adventures.

He did not allude to my broken engagement or to any unpleasant topic; and I imagined from his manner towards me, he had no knowledge of the occurrences which were troubling my heart. He spoke to me as if I were soon going to settle down happily upon my property, and I, coward that I was, let him remain in this delusion. Once, to change the subject, I asked him if he had heard anything about the Dashwoods.

"No; they are far away by this time, I should say. Your father showed a wonderful Christian spirit with regard to that matter. I am sure if he had only been a little more active he would have caught that fellow. Upon my word, I think one

may carry the never-mind-it-can't-be-helped style of thing rather too far. By-the-bye, do you know who are the present inhabitants of the old rickety place Merton and his father used to live in? Why, Crotchet and Quaver. You may well look surprised; I little expected ever to see them in this neighbourhood. An old uncle or aunt they had never heard of died, and made amends for neglecting them during life by leaving them a small independence, and they were kind enough to say that nothing would give them so much pleasure as to spend the remainder of their days near the family with the long pedigree. You remember the pedigree, don't you?" said Ernest in a low tone, with a sly glance in the direction of his wife.

"And what has become of Davis—poor, quiet, little man? I suppose he is quite trodden down in the crowd of life by this time?"

"Not at all. He is doing very well, and is head of a prosperous firm; married, and has a family."

I sighed. Every one seemed happier and more prosperous than myself.

"Have you heard anything of your friend Carlos, whom you used to talk about so much?" asked Ernest.

"Nothing. I dare say he has found out his great relations in Spain by this time, and has quite forgotten the poor farmer's son."

"Oh, nonsense! don't be fancying things. You are sure to hear from him directly he has anything pleasant to tell."

"Still the same as ever," I said; "always look-

ing on the bright side of things. I wish I could do so."

"So you can, if you like. A cheerful view of things depends more upon the will than any one imagines. You should keep the window of your mind quite free from dust, and then everything will look pleasant out of it."

"Very easy to say," I replied; "but you are not cursed with a disposition like mine. But, to change the subject, how on earth do you manage to get on with your writing in the midst of all this confusion?"

Confusion it was, for the chairs and tables were loaded with the occupations of the different members of the family, and there were two or three conversations all being carried on at the same time.

"It is no confusion to me," he replied; "I am so used to it. I really think if they were all to go away I should not be able to do anything, I am so used to a Babel of tongues. We have all such perfect sympathy with each other, that nothing one does can interrupt the rest; and when we see how short life is, every hour we can spend together is too precious not to be made the most of."

He looked towards the old man, and I saw what his thoughts were full of.

The rector had not looked up during our conversation, and I was uncertain whether he was aware of my presence. I thought Miss Clarke meant to stay at the rectory all day; and as I was not in the humour for doing so, I prepared to take

leave. I did not tell any one of my approaching departure; but I intended to go abroad as soon as possible, and forget all my troubles, if I could. I was therefore certain I should never see the old man again, and so I determined to break in upon his reverie, and make him notice me. The venerable head still looked as intellectual as ever; the eyes shone with a soft lustre like that of the first star that attends the early moon, but their fire was gone; and his whole appearance betokened a carelessness of earthly things, and an intent contemplation of the spiritual world. I hardly dared to approach and break the train of those heavenly thoughts; but at last I gently placed my hand in his, and said in a low voice,—

"Mr. Marshall, do you remember John Aylmer?"

"Yes, lad; to be sure I do: he went to sea long ago. He would have been a fine character, if he had prayed for the grace of perseverance; but he always would say it was of no use to pray. Poor fellow, poor fellow!"

This allusion to bygone days brought tears to my eyes, but I bent close to him, and murmured, so that the others could not hear,—

"I am John Aylmer. I have been away for years. I am going away again for years. Will you not bless me before I go?"

"God bless you, my dear lad," said the rector, placing his thin hand upon my head; and then he looked earnestly into my face. What he read there did not seem to please him, for he shook his

head and whispered, "You show signs of struggle, but you have not conquered. Take care, take care."

And the old man leant back in his chair, and closed his eyes, as if even this short interview had been too much for him. I never saw my old friend again.

CHAPTER XII.

CARLOS.

WHEN I returned home, no questions were asked me. They all saw by my face how unsuccessful I had been. It was a practice in our family to avoid unpleasant subjects as much as possible, so no allusion whatever was made to my disappointment. Circumstances for once favoured my wishes, and the morning after my humiliating visit to Little Dale two letters were put into my hand. One bore a foreign postmark, and as it looked the most interesting, I reserved it; opening the other first, which was directed in a lawyer's hand. It was written by General Faulkner's man of business, and contained a polite offer for the purchase of Frampton Wick. More than its worth was offered, and as it joined the general's property, it was important that he should possess it. At any other time I should have found it difficult, perhaps impossible, to oblige a man who had turned me out of his house, but at this moment it would be highly advantageous to myself to do so. Therefore, without consulting any one, I resolved to accept his proposal; and immediately wrote an affirmative. The other letter confirmed me in my

resolution. It was from my friend Carlos, and the substance ran as follows:—

'MY DEAR BROTHER, AND VERY GOOD FRIEND,

'I do not know whether you have forgotten me, but I have not forgotten you. I have written to you two or three times, and had no answer. I have longed to communicate to you my great good fortune, and to share the happiness which only you can make perfect. If you will come to Spain you will find that the poor Spanish boy you once loved so much has not forgotten the kindness shown him in the land of cold, leaden skies, and warm hearts, and that he still looks back to the low-roofed farmhouses and green hedgerows of England, and still thinks of John Aylmer and the friends at Oakwood, with the most constant affection. I hope the world has gone well with you since we parted. I will now tell you once more what I have told you in other letters, and I will make it as brief as possible, for I long to embrace you once more, and recount to you in person each particular event that has happened to me since I came to my own country. Our friend the captain would give me no help to go out, as you know. Your father was most kind, and offered me money for my passage; but I would not take it, for I did not know that I might ever have an opportunity of repaying it. I resolved to work my passage out; and so went on board a trading vessel bound to Vigo. Heaven protected me, and I found myself amongst kind people, so that the voyage was not unplea-

sant. I hate the sea as much as you English love it, and suffered much all the way; but my companions were as good as rough sailors can be, and I was not forced to work much. I landed on the shores of beautiful Spain, friendless, and without money. I wandered from town to town, and told my story everywhere. I had taken away the piece of parchment which had been tied round my neck; but, alas, it had no signature, and I was quite unaware of my own name. I had nearly forgotten my own language, and it was some months before I could express myself clearly in it. But it was wonderful how well I seemed to know the towns and villages through which I passed; and if I had not known to what country I belonged, from the moment I set foot in Spain I should have felt certain I was a Spaniard. The people, the climate, everything I saw and heard was familiar to me; I had seen it all before; I knew it; and I trusted that the same intuitive recollection would guide me to my mother. In the meantime there was nothing to be done but to bear everything with patience and resignation. I found some kind friends who offered me employment, but I could do nothing, think of nothing, until I had discovered my family; and I wandered about, accepting hospitality from the different monasteries, and making inquiries in every town, hoping to hear of some one who might answer to the vision I had formed of my mother. Something in my heart told me that she was alive, and expecting me. I visited several cities, and spent

much time at Madrid, Valladolid, Cordova, Granada; but all my hopes fell as month after month passed and I discovered nothing. At last I reached the town of C——, on the coast, and the evening I arrived I strolled, thoroughly wretched and sick at heart, into the cathedral, at the time the monks were chanting vespers. The sweet sounds rolled through the arches, and the fragrance of the incense was grateful to my nerves after a long and weary journey.

The vespers were over; and I remained in a reverie behind one of the pillars. The congregation dispersed; but one of their number was still kneeling before a side altar, and I felt my soul attracted towards that motionless figure, in a manner which I could not account for. She (for it was a woman) seemed entirely absorbed in silent devotion, and the folds of her long mantilla shook with the agitation the vehemence of her unheard petitions occasioned. It was long before she arose; and all that time I remained behind the pillar, spell-bound, fascinated. I could not help watching her; and she was so absorbed in her occupation, that she was utterly unconscious of attracting any observation. At last she rose from her knees, uttered a long, deep sigh, and lifted her mantilla as if she were well-nigh breathless from suppressed emotion. I had time then to examine her features. My heart thrilled as I did so, for they seemed to belong to some person who had been known to me in another world. They were pale and careworn, but very handsome, and must have

been wonderfully beautiful in her youth. I watched her until she left the church, and then I sought the sacristan.

"Who is that melancholy woman who prayed so long before the image of Our Lady?"

"One who has seen great sorrow," said the sacristan, shaking his head. "That poor lady lost her husband many years ago in the war with the English; his ship was blown up, and only one man escaped to tell the tale. Her only son was on board with his father; and the poor lady is under the delusion that this child is still alive. There is some story of his having been picked up by an English vessel; but she has never been able to trace him; and it is unlikely that those British sea-wolves would save a child when so many brave men perished."

My heart beat violently on hearing this tale; but I concealed my emotion, and the old man continued,—

"She thinks her son will yet be restored to her; and every day, after vespers, she spends an hour in prayer before that altar; she says she is certain her prayers will bring him; and as day after day passes, and he comes not, her faith grows stronger instead of weaker, and she prays with increased fervour. It is a wonderful instance of faith; but I fear in this case it is unavailing. Faith cannot work miracles now-a-days."

"I am not so sure of that. What is the lady's name?" I asked, in a state of agitation.

"Donna Dolores Mandrano."

I seemed to know the name. I felt convinced it was my own.

"You do not recollect the name of her lost son?"

"Yes, I do. He was a bright, handsome, little fellow; his eyes and hair were very like yours; and his name was Carlos. He used to run about the coast here, and watch the ships almost before he could speak."

"And has his mother lived here always?"

"Always. And when she is not at church, she is generally on the sea-coast, watching for the ship which, she says, is certain to bring him some day."

I could hardly contain myself when I heard this, and eagerly asked to be directed to her residence. The kind sacristan offered to guide me there himself. "You have perhaps brought her news of her son; nay, perhaps you are he himself," he added, looking at me curiously.

"I have reason to believe that I am."

"Oh, how overjoyed the good lady will be. Come with me quickly; we have not a moment to lose. Let us not give her a minute's more suspense." I was in as much haste as he was; and we hurried together to the suburbs of the town. We knocked at the gates of a moderate-sized house, and found ourselves in a paved court. A fountain stood in the midst of it, and the pleasant, dripping sound spoke music to my heart. Here then my mother had lived so many years watching for me. I could not help observing every little thing. There was a seat near the fountain, and on it lay a rosary.

I took up the beads and cross, and pressed them to my lips. *She* entered, and perceived my actions, and for a moment surprise rested on her countenance; but only for a moment.

"Mother, mother!" I exclaimed, rushing towards her. "Do you not know me?"

The shock was too much for her; she fainted, and for a time I feared that Heaven had given me a great joy, only as the precursor of a great sorrow. But in a little while she revived; and who shall describe the delight of that first interview? There could be no doubt of my identity, for dates corresponded, and the piece of parchment was certainly in the handwriting of my father. My mother wept when she looked at it; and produced his last letter to her, the writing of which was exactly the same. The few hurried words, written at the time of his death, needed no signature. "I was certain you would come, quite certain," she said. "I watched for you so long." And then we talked till we could hardly talk more. She told me about my father; how good and brave he was, and how proud I ought to be of being his son. And I told her of my English life, and of my English friends; of you, dear brother, and of all who were kind to me. I cannot tell you how happy we felt; my soul had at last found a resting-place, and every day I am happier and happier. Brother, dear brother, come out here, and witness our happiness. You will love this land; you will love the deep blue skies; the orange-trees; the easy life; the poetry and the music, and the beautiful

Spanish donnas with their black eyes and graceful mantillas. My mother will be overjoyed to welcome you. I have many friends who will love you for the kindness you showed to the poor Spanish boy, when he had no name, and no friends. I must tell you that my surmises were correct; I am a noble, and have power here to do you good. Come, and let me show my gratitude.

I am, your friend for ever,

CARLOS MANDRANO.'

How like my own Beauty was this warm-hearted letter! I must go to him certainly; and in a strange land should lose the recollections of the insults I had been subjected to. I read the letter aloud to my father and mother. "You must go, of course," they said; and I resolved to go as soon as the sale at Frampton Wick was completed. Carlos's letter could not have come more opportunely. I resolved not to say farewell to any of my village friends, except my own family; for I could not stand another interview with the rector, and the happy circle at the parsonage; and Little Dale was of course forbidden ground. Miss Clarke too was to be avoided; and as for George, he was more obnoxious to me now than ever, for I had an idea that Mary, moved by his constancy, and my faithless conduct, might consent to be his after all, especially as her mother had always been favourable to him. I did not go to church my last Sunday at home, for I thought I should meet most of them there, and might be asked disagree-

able questions. So I wandered about the woods and fields, just as I had done in the days of my childhood, and went over in thought all that had happened to me since then. It was not a satisfactory retrospection. In worldly fortune I had advanced, but my mental and spiritual state had sadly retrograded; in spite of my self-love, I could not help being aware of this. I was in a most uncomfortable state of mind, and longed to fly from myself, and from all human beings. Had I been a Romanist, I should have gone into a monastery, and most probably after a time repented bitterly of the step. Life had lost its interest to me; and, though still so young, I seemed to have passed through every emotion the human heart is capable of feeling. I little knew what a capacity for suffering my soul still possessed! I little knew what hidden depths of feeling I had still to discover! What a fearful awakening lay before me! What a terrible foretaste of everlasting torments!

The morning breaks fresh and clear over the Lighthouse whilst I write. The sea is green and sparkling: this day will bring much joy to many human beings; to me it brings only renewed agony. Pieces of wreck are floating by, but no one mourns over them; I am alone and miserable, but no one thinks of me!

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

I WAS wandering up and down the quay of the nearest sea-port town to our village. I always did matters of business in a very desultory manner, and had put off till the last moment taking my passage to Spain, though there were one or two vessels in the harbour bound for that country. My attention was attracted by a long, rakish-looking craft lying close to the molehead; she was my old ideal of a corsair's vessel, and was evidently built for fast sailing. The red ensign of the merchant service flew at her peak; but I thought as I looked at her, that the black flag, with skull and cross-bones, would have been more appropriate. I was pleased with the appearance of this scampish-looking vessel, and resolved to find out where she was bound, that, if possible, I might go by her. I called to one of the rough, red-capped men who were lounging over the bows, smoking, and asked him.

"There and back again," was the surly answer.

"Where's your captain?"

"What's that to you?"

"I want a passage on board your craft," said I; opposition making me only more determined; and

if the vessel were bound to the North Pole, I now resolved to sail in her and no other.

"That's another thing. Come aboard, and we'll chaff a bit;" and he put a gang-board across, upon which I stepped, and was soon in the midst of the wildest set of men I ever met with.

"Where's your captain?"

"Never mind. I'm second mate. Will that suit you?"

"Are you empowered to take passengers?"

"In course."

"Where are you bound?"

"To C——, first; then it's not on my books. Cap'n knows."

The very place I wanted to go to! The very town where Carlos lived! My bargain was soon made. I agreed to pay well, and was promised superior accommodation. I was to send my things on board immediately; and we were to start that same evening; the blue-peter was even then flying at the foretop; and I anticipated great pleasure from a swift voyage across the bay in that romantic vessel. How different from a slow passage in a regular sailing packet! I made little delay in taking up my quarters. I had a tolerable cabin to myself; and found that all had been prepared for me with more attention to comfort than is usually shown amongst seafaring men.

"Where is the main cabin? cannot I go there?"

"No, not yet. It's the captain's own, and he's busy there."

"Where do the other passengers dine, then?"

"Bless you, there aint no other passengers. Few people are such fools as to go along with us."

I thought he was joking, so made no other inquiries; but paced the deck, smoking, whilst we were getting under way.

They were much quieter than most merchant seamen; there was no singing, little shouting, and the orders were given in a sharp, quick tone, like that used on board a man-of-war. We warped out of the harbour, and left the bay under easy sail. All this time I saw nothing of the captain, or of the first mate.

"What's your cargo?" asked I; trying to get up a conversation with my taciturn friend.

"Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies."

Oh! I was rather sorry I had subjected myself to this; and wished I had been contented to have performed the voyage as other people would have done. We sailed fast, and had a fair wind, and before the sun had set were out of sight of English land. How little I thought what a culprit I should be when next I saw those white cliffs, and that grey-green sea! As soon as we were out of sight of land the captain appeared on deck, and what was my astonishment when I recognised the still handsome face, and care-for-nobody expression of the villain Dashwood? Unable to contain my fury I rushed at him, and would have struck him, but I recollected I was on board ship, and might be thrown overboard any moment by two of those determined fellows, and nobody be the wiser. I

was not so successful in my attempts at governing my tongue; I assailed him with a volley of reproaches, and upbraided him severely with his treacherous conduct.

"Villain! traitor!" I exclaimed; "have I found you at last? We must fight! You have been my father's enemy, and I will avenge him."

"Very fine talking!" said the captain, in the old, cool manner I so well knew. "Very fine talking! how do you propose to set about it?"

"Take off your coat, and I'll show you," I exclaimed, nearly bursting with rage, and feeling my hands tingle with impatience.

The most prudent plan would have been for me to have pretended not to recognise Dashwood at all, for I was entirely in his power now; but I never thought of prudence when my passions were roused, and at that moment I felt that I would give my life with pleasure to have the satisfaction of knocking his head against the bulwarks.

The captain gave me a contemptuous glance, and beckoned two of his men to come to us.

"Bring me a pair of bracelets," he said to one of them.

"Ay, ay, sir." And to my horror he returned with a pair of handcuffs.

"Put them over this gentleman's lily-white hands."

My wrists were in a moment clasped in an iron embrace.

"Now come below," said the captain; and I was forced to follow him down the companion ladder.

We entered a cabin so full of the fumes of tobacco, that it was as if we were walking into a cloud.

Merton was lying on the starboard berth, smoking. He had grown into a dissipated-looking young man, but he had not lost the jovial smile that had won my heart in olden days.

"Hullo, father! what are you tormenting that poor fellow for? How are you?" turning on his side, but not offering to get up. "How are you, friend John?"

"Hold your tongue, Merton; you're too fond of talking. I want to say a word to our friend. Now listen to me, John Aylmer. You are on board my ship, and must knock under, so you may as well do it at once. How much money have you got on board?"

I mentioned the sum, for I knew my luggage might easily be searched, and all I possessed taken away. I was obliged to give up keys, and explain where my cash was, and words cannot express the rage and humiliation I experienced at seeing Merton and his father coolly counting over and dividing my property.

"Give him a little sum back, father," said the ever-considerate Merton. "It wont do to let him land penniless on a foreign shore."

"He ought to think himself lucky if he lands anywhere," replied the father. "He would have been food for fishes by this time if he had insulted anybody else as he has me." But he courteously returned me a part of my own property.

I had come abundantly supplied with money, for I did not know how long I might remain abroad, and the sum returned to me by the Dashwoods would suffice until I could write home for a remittance; but it was most provoking to be robbed in this manner; and I stood biting my lips and tongue with vexation, and bitterly regretting my hair-brained folly in placing myself within the power of such men. After this enormity, the captain turned to me with a smile, and said,—

"Now, friend John, will you promise to behave yourself civilly?"

I was too sulky to answer.

"You had better," continued the captain; "because if you get mutinous, there are irons, and loaded pistols also," and he pointed to the bulk-heads, which were ornamented with arms of all sorts—muskets, bayonets, tomahawks, and pistols. "You see we are well provided; but I'll just give you a hint which you'll do well to take. Now I advise you to forget that there ever was such a person in the world as Dashwood. I am not him; I have nothing to do with him. My name is Reynolds, so is Merton's; and you needn't mention that you ever met me before, or ever heard of me. The first time you do, you'll get a bullet through your head; so keep your weather-eye open, and look out for squalls. Now, if you'll promise to behave yourself, I'll take those bracelets off."

I nodded my head, for I was still too angry to speak, and I was soon released from durance.

"Now you may do as you like," said the cap-

tain; "for we wish to treat you like a gentleman, and you can always mess with Merton and me, especially after the handsome payment you have given us."

Very kind, certainly! But I resolved to have as little to do with them as possible. My blood boiled at the sight of them. I went to my own cabin, and lay down in my berth in weariness and disgust. The vessel was cutting fast through the waves, but I had no heart to go on deck; the pleasure I had promised myself from the voyage was entirely spoilt, and I knew not what might happen to me before I arrived at my destination. In an hour or two my door was rudely burst open, and Merton stood before me.

"A sudden appearance," said he; "and one not very welcome, I fear. But I knew you would not admit me, unless I took French leave."

"You're right," I said. "I don't want to have anything to do with you. You've done us harm enough already."

"I know it," said Merton. "By-the-bye, what a blessed old innocent your father is. He might have caught us twice if he had only set to work a little quicker; but he is as easily gulled as a child."

I was exasperated.

"Don't insult me, Merton; I am in your power; but take care, for I may do you an injury, even though I were to be hanged for it afterwards."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said Merton, in his old coaxing way; "don't throw your friends away in

that fashion; I'm not so bad as I look; besides, I'm not the principal in this affair. Do be reasonable and just, and talk the matter over quietly."

The tone of his voice, the expression of his face, all reminded me so much of the days when he had such complete ascendancy over me, that unconsciously I again yielded to his influence.

"Don't be alarmed at the little incident that happened just now," he continued; "it was only to frighten you, I dare say. I'll get the money back for you before you land. So cheer up, old boy."

"It's not the money," I cried; "it's the way you've disappointed me all my life; you are so shallow, so——"

"And what are you, pray?" said Merton, with a peculiar look.

I thought of Mary, and felt that I had no right to accuse any one.

"How could you go and swindle my good, kind old father in the way you have?"

"It wasn't me. It was my father. Besides, he was forced to do it. The unfortunate have no choice. Oh, John, you have never known what it is to be poor."

"I don't call *this* being poor. You have managed to fit out a pirate, or a slaver, or something of the sort."

"Stuff! Do you suppose every rakish-looking vessel is a pirate or a slaver? This ship is nothing but a poor old fruiterer, and her timbers are as rotten as ever they can be. It will be a mercy if we don't all go down bodily when we get into the

Bay, if we have any wind. And my father is a lunatic in the matter of carrying on; nothing stops him."

"I wish to heavens I had never come on board. I certainly never would, if I had caught a glimpse of you, or your father."

"Ah!" said Merton, with a knowing wink, "we know better than to show ourselves, I can tell you. We're known in those parts; and what on earth could possess my father to go there I can't imagine. We're partners, you know; but I often suspect he does a little bit of underhand trading on his own account, and I tell him so too. He's sure to get caught one of these days, if he goes on in this manner."

"And a good job too," said I. "If you were both hanged, the world would be rid of two rogues."

"Very true; but rogues have a deal of cunning; and even hanging sometimes wont kill them. Why, I had an uncle who was hanged once, but he managed to slip the knot somehow, and, though making believe all the while to be dead, he was cut down by his friends, and half-an-hour afterwards was as drunk as a lord."

And so Merton rattled on. It was of no use reproaching him, for he turned everything into a joke. He seemed to think his father's conduct to me the most amusing piece of humour that had ever been perpetrated; and to look upon the attempted ruin of my father as a talented expedient, worthy of honourable mention. All conscientious-

ness seemed dead within him. I never met with a human being so utterly callous to the sense of shame. There he stayed; his self-esteem, no doubt, prompting him to think that his presence was, in spite of my asseverations, highly acceptable to me; and, do what I could, it was impossible to get rid of him.

"Do go away, Merton. I want to go to sleep."

"Sleep? sleep? why, bless me, you don't want to sleep, do you? You're as bad as a marine. I knew a marine once who could sleep all round the clock. A funny fellow he was, too, in a great many ways. He came pestering me one day, wanting to know the name of a line-of-battle ship in the distance. I told him the number of yards she carried, and desired him to multiply by the number of guns, and divide by the number of tons, and that then he would get the name of the ship, where she was from, and where she was bound. Do you know, the fool actually believed it, and set to work calculating in real, right earnest? Now, as you really are so very sleepy, I'll go; only just let me give you one piece of advice; don't get obstreperous to my father, and talk about hanging, because he wont take it as patiently as I do. He thinks nothing of shooting a man, and killed a Lascar three weeks ago for being impertinent to him. I believe he has got his ears in the locker now."

I thought this was only one of Merton's exaggerations; but, notwithstanding, could not repress a shudder of horror at hearing such an atrocity so coolly spoken of.

"What a barbarian you must be to stand by and see such things!"

"Oh! one gets used to anything in time. It doesn't do to be over-nice. You should only just see what I've seen on board slave ships, and that sort of craft; it's enough to make one's hair stand on end to think of it!"

"Are you not afraid to tell me of these things, for fear I should inform against you?"

"Not a bit of it. You are perfectly welcome to make what use you please of any intelligence you can pick up. Besides, if I was afraid, a bullet would settle you in less than no time, as my father says." And so smiling his old smile, he left me to my unpleasant meditations. How often I thought of that line of Shakspeare's,—

"A man may smile and smile, and be a villain."

The waves dashed up against the bulwarks; the breeze was freshening; mirth and jollity reigned in the main cabin; they were drinking and singing there as the shades of night closed in, and one little star peeped down upon me through the bull's eye, as if it meant to say, "Poor soul! you do not deserve it, but you shall have one glimpse of heaven, even in the midst of all this depravity."

The night was passed in bitterness of soul; and in the morning I conquered my pride so far as to go on deck and breathe the fresh air,—doubly grateful to me, after so many hours in a close cabin. A calm overtook us, and for some days we floundered in the chops of the Channel.

During this period, I was forced to be tolerably sociable, for I should have gone mad had I been left altogether to my own resources. I never could look upon the captain, it is true, with any equanimity, and he did not intrude himself much upon me; but with Merton the case was different. He was so utterly unconscious of having done anything wrong, that at last I began to persuade myself that he was right; and he so skilfully shifted the blame of all his nefarious transactions upon his father, that I felt, or tried to feel, that in reality he was much less guilty than I supposed him. He became necessary to me; and we paced the deck arm-in-arm, and talked of olden days, when we had been all in all to each other, until my old affection began to return; and I could hardly believe he was not the same frank, amiable being I had at first deemed him. Things seemed to fall naturally into their old course; he regained the dominion over me simply by the extraordinarily light-hearted and jocular manner in which he looked upon everything; and he amused me so much, that the days never seemed long, or the passage wearisome. We were not destined to spend the whole voyage in this tranquil manner. A breeze sprang up, and soon freshened into half a gale. I found that what Merton said was perfectly true; the captain's hobby was fast sailing, and nothing would please him but trying the speed of his vessel. She flew like a bird over the waves, but still nothing would induce him to shorten sail. I felt convinced that the masts would soon go by the board if we went

on in this way; and I ventured loudly to remonstrate against the folly of sacrificing all our lives to an absurd fancy.

"I say, youngster," was the answer, "do you remember the story of Sir Cloudesley and the man who interfered with him?"

"Yes, I do," was my answer; "and I remember the fate of Sir Cloudesley when he disregarded the advice given him."

"Say another word, and I'll put you in irons."

I was silent immediately, for I knew he would think nothing of putting his threat in execution. My impression is, that he was half intoxicated; for no man in his senses would have carried topsails in such a gale. We were going at a tremendous pace; the sea was boiling and foaming; clouds coming up in the distance prophesied more wind; and the masts creaked under the weight of canvas.

"I say, this is getting rather too severe," said Merton to me, as we tried to steady ourselves by clinging to the bulwarks.

"For Heaven's sake, speak to your father," said I; "he must be mad to do this."

The wind roared so loud, that I did not hear Merton's answer; but he went to his father. I did not hear what passed; both seemed angry; but Merton at last got his own way; and I heard the word given—"In gaff-topsails!" I could see that Merton was much alarmed, and in a great hurry to have the order obeyed; some of the tackle had got foul, and one of the crew went aloft to clear it. He was slow and awkward; and my friend, with a

furious gesture, bounded up the ratlines to do it himself. He was careless in his movements, and near-sighted; the vessel gave a tremendous lurch, and in one moment my poor friend was tossed off the rigging, and precipitated into the black, roaring sea. His head must have struck against something in the fall, for he made no attempt to save himself. I heard a piercing, despairing cry; I saw a black object borne away by the retreating waves; presently it sunk, and the brilliant, fascinating, unprincipled Merton was no more.

All this passed in less time than it takes to tell it. I turned to look at the captain; his face was white as death; he seemed hardly conscious of what had happened, and utterly unable to give an order.

Impelled by an irresistible impulse, I took upon myself to give the word of command to shorten sail, and heave-to; and strange to say, those wild, rough men obeyed me. In a moment of difficulty and terror it is always the strongest will that governs. "Lower the cutter!" I shouted, but this time unavailingly. The men said it was an impossibility that the boat could live in such a sea. In these last few moments the gale had risen surprisingly, as if on purpose to frustrate our efforts. I would have willingly risked my life to save the friend of my childhood, but I could get no one to accompany me. "He's gone, sir; it's of no use," said a man with a better countenance and gentler manners than the rest; "we can do nothing for him." The captain was completely sobered by the

loss of his son. He sank on the deck with a gesture of despair; all his courage and bravado was gone; and at first I thought he was dying. Affection for Merton was the only soft part remaining in the character of that reckless man. At last he roused himself, and calling the second mate, desired him to take command of the vessel, and to bring her into port as quickly as possible. Then he descended into his own cabin, and slammed the door after him with such violence, that we could hear it even amidst the howling of the storm. That was a fearful and a melancholy night, and terrible it must have been to the soul of that miserable man. In spite of the injuries he had done us, I could not help thinking of him and pitying him, as he lay there all alone without a comforter and without a hope. I would willingly have gone to him, but I was uncertain what reception I might meet with. Some souls rejoice in being pitied; others fly to solitude like wounded birds, content if they can only hide their griefs from others more fortunate than themselves. I suspected the captain belonged to the latter class, and therefore forbore to intrude upon him. The wind abated the next morning, but the sea was trembling and rolling almost as much as it had done during the storm. The ship presented a scene of the greatest discomfort and confusion. Many of the spars were damaged, and the headsails were torn to ribands; much property below was broken and destroyed, and a spirit of ill-humour, gloominess, and discontent reigned amongst the crew.

How I missed the voice and the smile that would have made light of all this; the cheerful spirit that would have thrown a jest in the midst of that sulky, bearish group of men, and made them laugh in spite of themselves! I could hardly believe that Merton was gone beneath those defiant blue waves that tossed up and down, rejoicing in their strength; and I leant over the side of the vessel and gazed down into the depths, as if I expected to see the merry face and curling hair start from them, and resume the play of life. Only this time yesterday he was standing beside me, recounting some wild prank or hairbreadth escape, and planning future adventures!

The rest of the voyage was very unpleasant to me. The captain had not attempted to rouse himself from his savage state of grief, but remained in his own cabin, indulging in copious draughts of brandy. I believe he drank himself into a state of insensibility. The crew, no longer under the eye of Merton, were rough and uncivil; and when the blue hills of Spain rose before me, I experienced a feeling of intense relief. A new life lay before me; new friends, new hopes, new joys, and a new country. I would forget all that had happened, and throwing myself into the arms of my friend Carlos, would adopt his way of life, and carve out for myself a glorious future—the future of my dreams!

CHAPTER XIV.

MARAQUITA.

It was with no feelings of regret that I bade adieu to the long, rakish vessel that had attracted my admiration at first sight. I heard nothing whatever of the money stolen from me; and landed crippled in resources, but not dispirited, for I relied on the hospitality of my friend Carlos. Before I proceed further with my own story, I may as well say that I afterwards discovered my suspicions regarding Captain Dashwood's vessel to have been well founded. She was a slaver, well known on the coast of Africa, and did a little contraband merchandize also. I never discovered what business she had in the port where I was lounging on the day of my ill-fated embarkation, nor what induced the captain to venture so imprudently near those he had injured. I ascertained long afterwards that the vessel never accomplished that voyage in safety: the ill-fortune that attended her outset followed her to its close, and under the dominion of a drunken commander and an insubordinate crew, she must have sunk beneath the waves, for she was never heard of more. This was the end of my pattern hero—of the man I had so much admired, and wished to imitate. The voyage seemed like a terrible vision;

and for a time I could only imagine that I had met with Merton and his father in my dreams; but those raking masts and that red ensign were still in the bay, and proved to me that all I had suffered was only too true. The white town, the native place of my friend, lay before me; it was so dazzling in the sunlight, I could hardly look at it, though green balconies and green blinds relieved the monotony of its appearance; the sea was intensely blue before it, and the sky deeply azure above it. It was a new, cheerful, and exciting scene; and I felt that even I, with my blighted hopes and uneasy conscience, might in time be happy here. My first care was to find out the house of my friend. This was not difficult, for he had given me ample instructions concerning its whereabouts; and my frequent voyages and converse with men of many climes had kept up my knowledge of languages, and particularly of Spanish. I was not long, therefore, in finding out the residence of Carlos and his mother. It was a modest dwelling, I thought, by no means equal to their rank; but I did not know then that foreign nobles do not keep up appearances in the sumptuous style of those belonging to our own land. The lower windows were grated, and heavy doors guarded the entrance to the courtyard, one of which was open, and allowed me to see the tesselated pavement, and the fountain Carlos had spoken of. How well I could appreciate his emotions, as, trembling with joyous expectation, he entered those quiet precincts to claim and to find a

parent! I, too, was little less agitated, for I knew I was sure of an enthusiastic welcome. I felt such confidence in Carlos, that, though we had been separated for so many years, I counted upon his affection as securely as upon my own mother's, and I expected to find a second mother in his. What was my disappointment, then, on being told by the porter that both were absent at Madrid, and would probably not return for a fortnight! I felt chilled and dispirited; it is true they knew not of my coming, but I felt as if Carlos ought to have known, ought to have been expecting me. My pleasant project for taking him by surprise had failed, and I despondingly took my way to other quarters of the town, where I might find a cheap lodging, and wait his arrival. I wrote to England for remittances; also indited a long letter to Mary, telling her that her cruelty had driven me abroad to die in a foreign land; and sent an account to my father of the melancholy end of Merton Dashwood, and of the manner in which I had been treated by him and his father. By the time I received the answer to two of these letters (for to Mary's no reply was vouchsafed), my thoughts were very differently occupied.

I spent that day in exploring the town. I went to the cathedral, and tried to trace the spot where Carlos had found his mother. I mounted the rocks that stretched out into the bay, and watched the feluccas sailing to and fro. I stood at the corners of the street, and gazed upon the picturesque costumes and handsome faces of the

passers-by, who turned in astonishment to look at the grave, pale Englishman, who seemed to have nothing to do amongst that crowd of strangers. And when I had done all this, I went to the public walk, and mingled with the saunterers there. It was evening, and many beautiful beings were pacing up and down amongst the orange and myrtle-trees; the mysterious mantilla making their loveliness still more attractive, and the soft strains of their magnificent language mingling with that peculiar sound caused by the gestures of their fans, which spoke another language only understood by the initiated. I gave myself up to the beauty of this scene, and lounged at the upper end of the walk, feasting my eyes and ears, and trying to forget Oakwood, Little Dale, Frampton, and everything I had suffered. A sense of peace and enjoyment, to which I had long been a stranger, stole over me, and in a little while I had forgotten all my cares, and remained only sensible to the most poetical impressions. Presently my attention was arrested by a most interesting group. A gentleman in the Spanish uniform, decorated with orders, approached. He was a venerable-looking person, a thorough soldier; and as he passed he was greeted with profound respect by the bystanders. But, venerable as he was, the figure by his side possessed a far greater attraction in my eyes. Never, never did I behold anything more surpassingly beautiful; she was an embodiment of perfect grace and superb loveliness; and as she came near me I felt almost awed by the approach of so much

beauty. How shall I describe her? I cannot. That moment I felt what it was to love. I loved passionately, with my whole heart and my whole soul, and then I felt how mistaken I had been in fancying myself in love before. What I had felt for Mary and for Emmeline was but a passing fancy—a temporary fascination, kept up and augmented by other feelings, such as ambition in the case of Emmeline, and hatred of George in the case of Mary; but now, for the first time, my whole soul was in captivity, and I knew that my fate hung upon one human being. It was a terrible feeling, and yet a joyful one; a strange new sensation of unutterable happiness, and yet of intense suspense. On, on she went, so slowly, so gracefully, never thinking what a tumult she had excited in my breast; her beautiful eyes bent on the ground, after having been turned for a moment upon me. She was not like all the other Spanish ladies, for there is a great sameness in Andalusian beauty. That glossy black hair, those eternal large liquid black eyes, fascinate at first, but soon pall upon the stranger; he longs for some expression, some mobility of countenance, and would willingly have less beauty and more variety. There was no such fault to be found with the loveliness that had so fascinated me. She combined the charms of north and south; her fair, clear complexion reminded me of England; her large dark brown eyes were full of fire and animation, and yet the graceful Spanish languor was not wanting; and the dignity of her demeanour spoke of ancient grandee descent.

"She must have had an English mother," thought I, as I passed the other side of the trees, in order that, by faster walking, I might see her again as she approached the lower end, for there was something about her which forbade me to make my admiration too apparent. She perceived me, though, and must have seen what was passing in my mind, for she turned to the officer by her side and said,—

"Let us go home, father; it is growing late."

"Father!" Then the old man was not her husband. This was a satisfactory discovery, at any rate.

"Nonsense, Maraquita," was the reply. "What will Fernando say? You know he will be off guard directly, and will be sadly disappointed if he does not find you here."

My ears were very quick, and my sense of hearing was sharpened by my anxiety, so every syllable of their conversation was audible to me. A shade of sadness and of scorn passed over those beautiful features, and she replied,—

"If Fernando wishes for our society, he knows where to seek us; it is his office to wait upon me, and not mine to attend upon him. Besides, he has no claim upon me."

"The old pride again," replied the father. "You know how ardently he and his family desire an alliance with our house, and I would I could induce you to listen with a more favourable ear to his——"

Here they turned, and went up the walk again.

So there was evidently a lover in the case; but a lover whose addresses were not acceptable to this proud beauty.

I turned to one of the bystanders, and said,—

"Can you tell me the names of the officer and lady who have just passed?"

"Don Antonio Velasquez, the commandant of the garrison, and his daughter, Donna Maraquita."

"She is very beautiful."

"You may say so, indeed. She is the fairest beauty in the province, and as good as she is beautiful. Never a morning passes but what she may be seen on her knees before the image of our Blessed Lady praying for the ships in the offing, and for all poor, distressed souls. And the poor have never had a truer friend."

"She is fairer than most of your Spanish beauties. Was her mother a native of the north?"

"Her mother was an Englishwoman, and Don Antonio has never ceased to grieve for her; his only care and comfort is this daughter."

My informant continued speaking loudly in praise of Donna Maraquita and her father, whom he eulogized as one of the bravest generals of Spain. I was bound to the spot, for I could not leave it whilst she who had so captivated me remained. In a little while, two persons joined the general and his daughter. One was a young man, handsome and engaging in manner, but with an expression that prejudiced me against him at once. He was in the uniform of the Spanish guards, and looked a thorough soldier, until one studied his

countenance, and I soon saw there enough to make me dislike him. He could not look any one straight in the face; his eyes were sly and restless; and he seemed as if continually endeavouring to hide his real character from others, if not from himself. He approached Donna Maraquita with an air of loverlike haste, which I could perceive to be sincere, and sincere also was the coldness with which she received him. The other person, I supposed from the likeness, to be his father. He was not in uniform, but in the national costume, which at that time was only affected by those of the nobility who despised change and held to the ways of their fathers, the rest making way gradually for the French fashions. His countenance was more open and honest than that of his son, but fierce and uncompromising. It bore an impress of almost savage beauty; and whilst I gazed upon it my thoughts were carried away to the days of the Cid, and the old conflicts with the Moors. He engaged Don Antonio in conversation, whilst his son endeavoured to ingratiate himself with the latter's beautiful daughter.

"That is Don Iago Ballasteros," said the communicative person to whom I had before applied for information, "and the young man is his son, Don Fernando. They both belong to our highest nobility, and Don Iago is prouder than Lucifer himself. I wonder he condescends to tread the same earth with those of commoner descent. Watch him, now, as he lifts his hand to his sombrero, and greets that lady passing on the other

side! He thinks he has done her great honour, and yet she is a relation of the Queen."

"Can you tell me where the English consul lives?" I asked.

"May I ask, in return, whether you have any particular business with him?"

I thought this inquiry rather impertinent; but as I was in a hurry to have my question answered, and this man seemed to know everything, I considered that I should get my curiosity satisfied all the sooner by satisfying his. So I replied that I was anxious to obtain an introduction to the leading people of the town, and in particular to the commandant of the garrison.

"Ah! you have been fascinated by the lovely daughter, I suspect. You will wonder at my questioning you; but now I will tell you that *I* am the British consul." And he drew himself up with an air of conscious dignity. "Excuse me for ascertaining your business before I acknowledged this, but really we are applied to on the most trivial matters, and have to waste our time over the insignificant disputes of merchant captains continually. Had I found your business of this nature, I should have been tempted still to conceal my office; but as it is, you are welcome to any service I can render you. I am well acquainted with Don Velasquez and his daughter, and can easily present you to them. May I beg you to take my arm, and accompany me to where they stand?"

I did as desired, and to my unutterable joy

found myself opposite the object of my devotion. I soon found that my friend the consul was one of that silly class of people who think their own characters greatly depend upon the rank of their associates. He therefore introduced me to the commandant and his daughter as an English gentleman of rank abroad on his travels, and anxious to make acquaintance with the best Spanish society. He seemed to think that I should respect him highly, when I saw on what friendly terms he was with them; and that they, in their turn, would appreciate him more for his acquaintanceship with a distinguished English traveller. Don Antonio and his daughter received me kindly, complimented me on my knowledge of Spanish, and presented me to Fernando and his father, neither of whom seemed pleased at the interruption.

Don Iago scarcely deigned to bow, and Fernando looked daggers at me as I placed myself by the side of Maraquita. She seemed glad to have some one to speak to besides her scowling lover, and entered gaily into conversation with me, asking me many questions about England, a country in which she evidently took great interest. Fernando tried to join in the conversation, but he knew nothing of the subjects we were discussing, and was soon reduced to silence. Nothing, however, would induce him to leave us; and he remained, keeping a sullen guard over us both, whilst his father was still engaged in earnest conversation with Velasquez. Here, on the first day of my arrival in a

foreign land, I found new interests, a new world, a new future, and a new love! I, who a few hours before had thought myself desolate! I forgot my disappointment about Carlos; I forgot where he was, or when he was coming back; I never thought of asking for his address or of writing to him, but I threw myself with all the impetuosity of my nature into the new scenes that opened before me, into a new range of feelings, more engrossing than any I had ever experienced, and let myself glide unresistingly down the current. It was time for the party to separate. There was to be a tertulia at the commandant's house that evening, and to my great joy I was invited to join the guests. These parties are unceremonious and sociable gatherings of friends, and not magnificent entertainments; and during the evening I was much with Maraquita, and the more I saw of her, the more enthralled I became. Fernando was there also, and tried in vain to attract her attention. She was polite to him, but nothing more; and I saw that her father's remonstrance on the Alameda had had the opposite effect to what he desired. In my vanity, I attributed this partly to my presence; if I had known the truth sooner, how much misery might I not have been spared! My friend the consul was there also, flitting about, his hat under his arm, paying attention to all, and evidently thinking himself a great man amongst them. I have not described the commandant's house nor the numerous guests, for, in truth, I saw but little. I was entirely engrossed with Mara-

quits, and knew nothing of what was passing around.

She, on her part, did not reject my attentions. The novelty of them pleased her, perhaps; at any rate, she seemed glad of anything that would engross her, and be an excuse for ignoring the existence of Fernando, who hovered about, casting evil-minded glances upon me, and beseeching ones upon her. I was flattered and exhilarated by her apparent preference, and exerted myself more and more to be acceptable to her. I was sorry for Fernando; but the consciousness that I possessed a rival only rendered me more anxious to succeed in my object. How pleased Carlos would be if, by the time we met, I should have obtained a beautiful Spanish wife! This would bind me entirely to his country, and I might live here in affluence for what would be in England but a very moderate income. With my usual rapidity I built a charming castle in the air, and pictured to myself a delightful retreat in the midst of orange and myrtle-trees, adorned by the presence of this beautiful being, and enlivened by the friendship of Carlos. This would be better than any English farmhouse! Here would be no need for industry, thrift, or any vulgar English virtues; we should dream away a delicious existence, and live a life of romance. I felt that here I could submit to a quiet life, for everything was strange and romantic, and the commonest daily details would furnish food for thought and poetry. But the guests were departing; I lingered till the last, but could find no reasonable pretext for remaining longer.

"When shall I see you again?" I whispered to Maraquita, as I pressed her hand.

"To-morrow, on the Alameda, at half-past six," she replied, in a tone of encouragement.

The sweetest thoughts visited me as I walked home to my humble lodging, and I gazed on the moonlit scene before me and around me with the admiration of a pilgrim who has found at last the country of his hopes. Dreamily I traversed the streets, in no hurry to retire to rest, and prolonged my walk for the purpose of enjoying the pleasant reflections the events of that evening had called forth. Presently I heard footsteps behind me. I was evidently being followed and watched. Alarmed by this thought, I turned, and saw a figure, enveloped in a cloak, walking stealthily behind me. There was something in his hand, which shone in the moonlight like steel. I shuddered as I recalled the tales I had heard of Spanish jealousy and assassination, and determined to confront this cowardly spy, for such I deemed him. I was unarmed, but felt no fear, for I deemed a coward like this unworthy the apprehension of an honest man. So I stopped suddenly, and confronted him. I thought he might turn out to be a hired assassin, bribed by Don Fernando to get quietly rid of the obscure stranger who had come between him and his hopes. I had read of such things, and my imagination was prepared to give a romantic turn to everything that happened. But it was Fernando himself who stood before me, a malignant smile on his lips, and a cunning expression in his eyes. I no longer saw the dagger; it was concealed under

his cloak. I felt certain he had meditated some foul play, and resolved to tax him with it.

"So," said I, "this is Spanish courtesy!—to accompany a stranger home with a poniard in the hand! It was fortunate for you I discovered you in time, for I was on the point of drawing forth a loaded pistol and aiming at your head."

This was an untruth, but I felt it necessary to my own preservation that he should believe I carried arms.

"Excuse me," faltered the culprit. "I was hastening to overtake you, that I might have the supreme pleasure of accompanying you to your abode. I always carry arms at night, for these streets are infested by robbers, and the police are by no means active."

I was obliged to accept his excuses, though in reality I was by no means convinced that he had not had some sinister design in following me. He still walked by the side of me, and there we were, two unwilling companions, two chance acquaintances, hating each other already from the bottom of our hearts.

We were silent for a few minutes, and I wondered to what this strange interview would tend. At last, Fernando began talking of Velasquez and his daughter, and launched forth into extravagant praises of the latter. I saw he wished to draw out my opinion, so I merely assented to all he said, and put forth no remarks of my own.

"Ah! you have not known her as long as I have," he continued; "we have been intimate for

years. We were brought up together, and destined for each other. From our earliest infancy our parents had decided upon our union, and year after year I find more reason to congratulate myself upon that decision. Am I not the most fortunate of beings to possess the love of one so perfect?"

I assented, though I doubted his assertion. The behaviour of Maraquita that evening, her encouragement of me, a perfect stranger, and her apparent oblivion of the existence of my confident companion, did not look much like love. I thought that all he said was probably an invention intended to divert me from my purpose, so I quietly listened as he continued,—

"My fate has been more fortunate than that of most true lovers, for I have the father's consent and approbation, and the mother also, before she died, approved of our union—Heaven rest her soul!" and the pious Spaniard crossed himself, and bowed as we passed a little image of the Virgin in a niche with a lamp burning before it. I felt quite provoked at his audacity, and could not help saying,—

"She did not seem very warm towards you this evening."

"You are right. She is capricious, and tries my patience often; but I understand her, and know that these are all signs of love. You are young in these matters, probably, and know not how to read the eyes of Spanish women, nor see how those they love best are often the most severely tried, whilst strangers and indifferent persons are for a moment

elevated to a consideration they have no right to expect, and cannot hope to last."

"That remains to be proved," said I. "There are exceptions to every rule."

The Spaniard took no notice of my remark, but continued,—

"Those of our nation who are thwarted in these matters never fail to take a terrible revenge. The offender is watched, pursued for months perhaps, but never escapes. Several instances of this have happened in our province lately. One in particular, I remember, when a lover watched his rival coming from Mass, and stabbed him in broad daylight."

"And was he not apprehended and brought to trial?" I asked, well knowing for what purpose this history was told me.

"Oh no," he answered. "The assassin was powerful, and well known in the neighbourhood, whilst the murdered man was only an obscure adventurer. But this is only one among a score of similar occurrences. In some instances, absence for two or three days is all that is necessary, and the avenger can return unmolested to his native town."

I was not given to fear, but I could not help feeling rather uncomfortable at being told such horrid stories by a man who hated me, and was moreover armed; especially as we were walking through a dimly lighted town, and few people were about. Besides, I was certain he had meditated an attack upon me, and was only kept from perpetrating it by the falsehood I had told. For the future I re-

solved never to go unarmed, for I suspected this man to be a coward, and thought he would be easily kept in order by the knowledge that he had to deal with a brave man. I did not choose him to know where I lodged, though he seemed determined to accompany me, so stopped short some little distance from the house where I abode, and bowing low, I said, "My lodgings are not far distant: I have the honour to wish you a good evening."

CHAPTER XV.

JEALOUSY.

It may be easily imagined that I did not fail to keep my appointment with Maraquita the next evening. Fernando's covered threats rather excited my rivalry than quenched it, and I resolved to spare no pains in my efforts to supplant him. Not that my love needed any other motive to serve as fuel, for it was passionate and unextinguishable; and I could think of nothing but the happy moment, in which, as I felt confident, the beautiful Spaniard would consent to be mine. Had I not succeeded twice, when my ardour was not by any means so great; and should I fail now that my soul was thoroughly taken captive? Alas! I had yet to learn that it is easier to be loved, when we are ourselves untouched by the flame, than, when heart, soul, and mind are bound up with the smile of one being. In the first case, we have the full control of our words and actions; in the last, we are carried about by the winds and waves of our passion.

Maraquita was a very different being from Mary, or from Emmeline. There was none of the commonplace good-humour, the housewifely virtues, the plain good-sense of the former, none of the

sarcastic merriment, the literary tastes, or the restless temperament of the latter; but all was quiet, composed, dignified, and mysterious. She did not talk much, but what she said had a peculiar beauty; partly produced by the softness of her native tongue, partly by the sweetness of her voice. She seemed to have but small acquaintance with books, and still less with foreign countries; and this was shown in the quaintness of her remarks, and the curiously simple questions she asked me. What a mind is here to be developed, thought I! What a delightful task to instruct this paragon of beauty and grace in something besides the language of the fan, and the mysteries of Spanish flirtations! And she is so eager for information, which these dark-eyed, scowling cavaliers, who think of nothing but serenades and petty feuds, are utterly unable to afford her. It will be a blessed fate for her to marry a sensible, well-informed Englishman. But I am anticipating the course of my reflections, for Maraquita was so reserved, that it was some days before I advanced thus far in my estimate of her character. We met that evening. Fernando was there also. I resolved to be more cautious than I had been the previous evening, and did not devote myself so exclusively to Maraquita. I was satisfied for the present with having, as I thought, established a mutual understanding between us; and feared, not the jealousy of Fernando, but the suspicions of Don Antonio, which might be roused, if I allowed my purpose to become too apparent. So I did not

prevent Fernando from bearing his share in the conversation; and sometimes left him entirely master of the field, whilst I endeavoured to ingratiate myself with the father, and propitiate the haughty Don Iago, who walked by his side. But not a word could I get from the supercilious grandee, whose pride was rendered more conspicuous by the frank and soldier-like bearing of the commandant; and I gave up the attempt in despair, and devoted myself entirely to the latter. I found him a man worth trying to please; he was kind to me, as being an Englishman, and a countryman of his wife; and we entered into conversation, entirely regardless of the cold looks cast on me by our haughty companion, who took good care, however, not to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*, which was going on behind us. I did not object to Fernando's being with Maraquita, for I saw she did not like him. Had she shown partiality for him, I should have tried to spoil their conversation immediately—so selfish is love! Once as I glanced behind at them, Maraquita beckoned me to her side. I abruptly broke off a sentence I was addressing to her father, and joined her. It may well be imagined how this little incident flattered my vanity. What could be the cause of it? She must have a great value for my society, as she could not spare a little of it, even to her father. The more obvious interpretation would have been, that she was heartily tired of the society of her unwelcome lover, and wished for a break to his wearisome conversation. But the

preference was decidedly encouraging, and my hopes rose high as the cloud obscured Don Fernando's brow; and I saw from his uneasy manner, that, in spite of his expressed contempt for me, he was furiously jealous. He endeavoured to conceal it in the presence of Maraquita, and addressed me in a bland and affable tone, which, however, did not deceive me. Don Antonio again invited me to his house that evening; and matters still went on in the same way. The next evening and the next were spent in the same manner; for the noble Spanish soldier was truly hospitable, and seemed to consider it a duty to make my stay agreeable to me. Fernando was nearly always there; and his father often looked in and watched the amusements of the young people, with a grave and grim satisfaction. He evidently desired the alliance between his house and that of Don Antonio; and thought that as long as his son was a constant guest, and a welcome friend of the father, all would go right at last. I know not whether Velasquez perceived my attentions to his daughter; they were checked by neither; and nothing prevented my indulging in the wildest hopes. I thought that as he had married an English wife, he could see no objection to his daughter marrying an English husband; and that now the Fates had decreed that at last I should be compensated for all my sufferings. The time drew near for the return of my friend Carlos and his mother. My thoughts were so engrossed, that, I grieve to say, I did not look forward to this event with the pleasure I

ought to have felt. I dreaded any change; I was too happy in the present to wish for more; and I feared lest some untoward event should bring my happiness to an end. One evening the guests had departed, and only Fernando and myself remained with Velasquez and his daughter. We had all been very merry, for the fierce Don Iago was absent, and Fernando's jealousy had been slumbering for a while.

Suddenly an idea struck Don Antonio, who had not spoken for some minutes, and his countenance lit up with pleasure, as he exclaimed,—

"Why, Maraquita, Donna Dolores and Carlos will be here to-morrow. How long they have been away!"

Maraquita did not answer; and, to my distress and astonishment, I perceived a deep blush overspread her lovely face. I had never heard the names of Carlos and his mother mentioned in this house, and therefore concluded that the families were not acquainted with each other. I said nothing; but waited to see whether Fernando were as much annoyed as myself.

"Who is this Carlos?" he asked, quickly.

"A friend of ours," replied the commandant; "and a very agreeable one too. He is a fine young man; it is a pity he is not a soldier."

"A friend of yours? how is it I never heard of him?" continued Fernando, looking angrily at Maraquita.

"Because we made his acquaintance when you were in Mexico. His mother and he have been

at Madrid for some time. Did you never hear the story of Donna Dolores and Our Blessed Lady of Battles?"

"No."

"I am surprised at that, for the priests have published it under the name of 'The Reward of Prayer.' But I will tell it you, if you are not in a hurry to go; and perhaps this English gentleman may be interested, for some of his nation had much to do with it."

And to my great amusement, he told us the history of Carlos, as he had learnt it from this little book, which was evidently full of exaggerations and poetical licences. It made out that Carlos had been sold as a slave to a cruel English pirate, under whose treatment he would have died of starvation, had it not been for the kindness of a noble English family of the name of Telmero, and in particular of one of the sons, whose name was Juan, and who was to him as Jonathan was to David. These people rescued him from his oppressor, and furnished him with funds to go back to Spain, where he arrived at last (after having been twice shipwrecked), to the intense joy of his mother, who had spent all these years in prayer for his return. There were romantic adventures mixed up with the tale, which not only *did* not, but *could* not have happened; and I could not help smiling, as beneath this farrago of nonsense, I traced the thread of the real story.

"I think, father, you have not quite got the

right history of Don Carlos's adventures," Maraquita said, gently.

"How, child?" replied the father. "It is all in Father Hieronimo's book."

"Very likely; but Don Carlos says himself that many things in that book are exaggerated, and he laughed much when I showed it him. He has often told me the true story, and it had nothing in it about pirates or shipwrecks, except just at the beginning, where there was a wreck certainly, for the ship blew up; but the people who picked him up, he said, were very good to him, for they gave him a home until he was of an age to seek his friends."

"But then the story of the friendship was true, certainly; for Carlos speaks often of some Englishman to whom he is much attached, and he once told me he expected a visit from him some day. What was the name? Juan Telmero, the book says."

"All wrong," said Maraquita. "It was some name like Elmer, only that is not quite it."

I had hitherto listened in silence, wondering to what all this would tend, but I now thought I might derive some advantage from being the friend who had stood by Carlos in his troubles. So I interrupted them with the question,—

"Are you sure his name was not Aylmer, John Aylmer?"

"That is it," she replied. "But how did you know?"

"I am the very person, and I have come to see Don Carlos."

"You? you? But I thought your name was Oakwood."

I had, in truth, assumed the name of Oakwood on my arrival in Spain, because I thought it sounded better, and also because I wished to banish that of Aylmer, under which my projects had come to such an untimely end. But I now explained how that both names in fact belonged to me; one being the name of my family, the other that of the estate on which we resided. They knew nothing of English usages in these matters, and so were easily satisfied. Warmly was I thanked by the commandant for my kindness to his countryman; and I found that in one moment I had become vastly popular both with him and his daughter. Fernando said nothing, but appeared lost in reflections not altogether pleasant. I could not make out what was the matter with him. The name of Carlos seemed to have awakened in him a train of thought altogether unconnected with those present. At last he woke up and said,—

"Carlos? Carlos Mandrano? Surely I have heard my father speak of that name. There is an old feud existing between our family and his, I am certain."

"Do not talk of feuds, my son," said the grey-headed soldier; "or if you do, say there *was* a feud, not *is*. These things should not exist now-a-days."

"But they do exist, Don Antonio," replied the young man, seemingly pleased at being addressed as son by one he would willingly call father. "They *do* exist, unfortunately; but *we* shall not carry on the feud, I hope. I must ask my father more about it. I think a cousin of mine was killed by this Carlos's father, but I cannot remember the particulars."

"Be contented in forgetfulness," said the other. "There is nothing I object to so much as the revival of old quarrels."

"Some people cannot forget so easily," replied the young man. "My father is one of them. He never forgets or forgives."

"More shame for him," said Don Antonio.

The young man's eyes flashed, but he did not answer.

"Has Don Carlos been long in Madrid?" I asked, not because I cared to know, but because the conversation ran a risk of getting too warm to be pleasant.

"Yes, some time. It is the longest absence he has made since he returned; but it is to please his mother. She is anxious to get him some post about the Court, but he is utterly indifferent to it, for he says the corruption and dishonesty that goes on there is enough to prevent any man of principle from serving the King. I love Carlos, but he is too much a friend of the people to succeed in this country."

"Hush, father, you are talking of things you

had better be silent about," said Maraquita, with an alarmed look.

"Nonsense, child; there is no one here who will misrepresent my words."

"Why, surely," I interrupted, "the power of the Inquisition is past."

"You do not yet know this land," replied she; "there is a political inquisition as bad as the spiritual one you speak of, and spies are often in corners where you little expect to find them. The careless words uttered in family confidence are taken up and carried no one knows where or how; but the unfortunate speaker is sure to hear of them again. My father is rash, and proclaims his opinions everywhere."

"And never was the worse for it either," replied the soldier. "'A clear conscience is a silver shield.' Does not some one say that? Is it a proverb, or out of a book? I do not know, but it is a saying that is very familiar to me."

"Hark!" said Maraquita. "Do you hear that step in the court below? And that voice? It is surely Don Carlos."

"No, surely not," said her father; "he does not come till to-morrow." But he went to the window and exclaimed, "You are right, it is he, and Donna Dolores with him. What can have brought them here so soon?"

My heart beat fast, for I guessed my friend had heard of my arrival, though I had not sent him word of it, and following the instinct of his own

warm heart, had returned sooner on purpose to welcome me. My heart beat fast, and not with joy; for I remembered that look of Maraquita when his name was first mentioned in my hearing, and I felt that friendship would bear no comparison to love, and that my heart and soul were preoccupied. And yet I was miserably disappointed in myself for not being able to feel as warmly towards him, as I was convinced he felt towards me. Though I knew nothing, I felt as if I were taking his place, and I prepared myself to watch with lynx-eyed jealousy every sign and every look that passed between him and my beloved.

His mother entered, and he followed. She was a tall, magnificent woman, with a pale and emaciated countenance. It seemed as if the present joy had come too late to eradicate the trace of former sufferings, and it was more natural to think of her as her son had described her, as the motionless, persevering devotee in the cathedral, than as the happy mother rejoicing over the long-lost child. She spoke to all with dignified courtesy, and taking my hand in hers, welcomed me to Spain as the friend of her son, and said she had long felt as if she had known me well, for Carlos had told her everything concerning his childhood, and had singled me out as the one who had shown him most kindness. There he stood, my "Beauty," waiting until his mother had said her say, watching with unconcealed satisfaction every word that passed between us, and I, traitor that I was, cared for nothing but my ruling passion, and stole side-

long glances at Maraquita, yearning to discover whether Carlos had any claim upon her heart. There he stood, tall and handsome, like his mother; but the peculiar look of goodness and happiness which distinguished him in the days of his childhood still rested on his face, the innocence of youth reigned there triumphant, and love and gratitude shone from his large black eyes.

"John Aylmer!" he cried, embracing me, "do I really behold you? Why have you not come before? Now we will never let you go again, but will be happy together all our lives."

"No," thought I, "he cannot care for Maraquita, or he would not give himself up so unreservedly to me." For he had not yet attempted anything like individual conversation with her, but seemed entirely engrossed by his joy at seeing me. He held me by the hand and looked anxiously in my face.

"You are changed, John," he said; "you look careworn and sad, and there is actually a little silver sprinkled over your brown hair. Oh, John, what have you been doing to get grey at five-and-twenty?"

"A rough life," I answered, "makes men get old before their time."

"But that is all over now, is it not? You are coming to settle in my country, are you not? And how is that cheerful Mary Alton? I rather thought you would have brought her with you. Are you married yet? tell me, for I have heard nothing."

"Mary and I agreed to part some time ago," I

replied. "We were convinced at last that we should not suit each other, and her mother, of course, did all she could to forward the separation. My early dreams are over, and I must begin a new life," I continued, gloomily.

"I am not unselfish enough to repine at an event that has brought you near me," he answered, "but I grieve sincerely for your disappointment. I always thought Mrs. Alton an old vixen, but pretty Mary Alton—alas! alas! but it cannot be helped now, and it is no use to lament over it. We must find you a Spanish wife, some one like—like——" and his eye rested upon Maraquita.

I desired nothing better, but I did not say so. Carlos and I were seated apart from the rest in a corner of the room, or of course it would have been impossible to carry on the conversation. Fernando was trying to engross the commandant's beautiful daughter as usual, but her eyes strayed continually to the place where we sat, and I tormented myself by wondering whether they were interested in Carlos or in me.

"Is she not beautiful?" he asked at length.

"Who?" said I, for he had mentioned no name, and I wanted to find out whether he would have any timidity in pronouncing that of Maraquita.

"The lady opposite," he said, "Donna Maraquita, to be sure. There is not her equal in the world."

"She is very lovely," I replied, with difficulty. "I hear she is engaged to Don Fernando Ballas-

teros." A smile of scorn played on my friend's face, as he said, laughingly,—

"I suppose Fernando told you that himself. I never saw him until I was introduced to him just now, but I have heard of him, and know him to be the greatest braggart in Spain. His father is one of our wealthiest nobles too, and perhaps the Don Antonio may have given him some encouragement, for most fathers think that money makes happiness; but I can answer for Donna Maraquita, and assure you that she would never consent to marry a mean-spirited, sneaking fellow like that."

"Hush!" said I, "if you raise your voice you will certainly be heard. Remember we are not alone."

Carlos was silent a few moments, and I had time to think. How intimate he seemed to be with her! *He* could answer for Maraquita! Oh, if he had only returned before my heart had become so helplessly entangled! I could have given her up to him then, but not now. It had become with me a matter of life or death, and the uncertainty of my fate was almost maddening. But perhaps after all he was only a friend, and not a lover! Soothing myself with this reflection, we continued our conversation, and I told him all that had happened to me since our parting, omitting whatever was discreditable to myself. It went to my heart to receive his warm and friendly sympathy, when I knew how little I could give him in return. It was getting late, and a movement was made for

breaking up the party. Donna Dolores and her son pressed me to take up my abode in their house, but this I declined, for how could I accept their hospitality when I suspected we were rivals in the matter nearest our hearts? They were angry and hurt at my refusal, but I pacified them as well as I could, and anxiously observed the leave-taking between my friend and Maraquita. I heard him say something about their trial having come to an end, I heard the words "future bliss," "eternal love." She made no answer, but the die was cast, and I felt that I had become the enemy of my friend. Carlos was unremitting in his attentions to me; he accompanied me to my lodgings, and again begged me to change my resolution, and gratify him and Donna Dolores by taking up my abode with them, but I felt that this was now more impossible than ever, and I grew almost angry as he persisted in his entreaties. Poor Carlos! How entirely unconscious he was of having given me offence! It was late, and yet when we reached my apartment I could not get rid of him; he sat down and began talking gaily of all that had happened to him since we parted, and confided to me all his hopes for the future, all his wishes for the improvement of his country. He said nothing would ever induce him to take a place at Court whilst affairs remained in their present condition; his highest hope was to see his country constitutionally governed, but at the same time he would never consent to join those who were determined to accomplish this by underhand means.

"It must be difficult for a man of your principles to live under the present despotic government," said I. "From what the commandant told me, I imagine you are likely to become a suspected person."

"Oh, few people will trouble their heads about me. I go my own way, and let other people alone; I join no party, and give offence to none; only I must be allowed to think as I please, and I am watching quietly for a favourable opportunity of being useful. Ah! I forgot. There is one man who would perhaps be glad to do me some harm. Have you seen the father of that Fernando? A tall, dark, despotic man, with piercing eyes and an iron-grey beard. There was a quarrel between my father and a relation of his once, and my father had the misfortune to kill him. Don Iago will never forget or forgive this, and the first chance I give him he will be only too ready to take advantage of. But I am talking you to death, and you will wish me anywhere. Let us spend to-morrow together, and I must try once more to shake your resolution of living like a hermit."

He departed without saying a word more about Maraquita, and I was left, not to sleep, but to brood over the strange position in which I found myself. Could I only have ascertained whether Maraquita loved me! She had certainly distinguished me beyond others, but I had not yet entered the lists with Carlos.

CHAPTER XVI.

REVENGE.

I WENT out betimes the next morning, for I knew Carlos would pay me an early visit, and I was desirous to avoid him. I could not make up my mind as to the line of action I intended to pursue. One thing only was certain,—I could not give up Maraquita to any one. I wandered through the town in the opposite direction of the suburb where Donna Dolores and her son resided, and soon got out into the open country. Here, without an object and without pleasure, I walked several miles in the same manner I had been accustomed in olden days to wander about the woods of my native parish, when anything preyed upon my mind. At last I heard the roar of the sea, and found I had made a large circuit which had brought me back to the neighbourhood of the town. I was now by the rocks of Santa Maria, which are washed by the waters of the bay, and look down upon the sea from a great height. The turf upon which I stood was dried up and slippery, the waves were roaring below, and a weak head might well have turned giddy at the sight. I stayed here some time contemplating the scene, when, to my great astonishment, I saw two figures in the

distance, which appeared to be those of Carlos and Fernando. It seemed unlikely that they should be walking together; but as they drew nearer, I found my eyes had not deceived me. I stepped aside behind a shelving rock, determined to observe their motions without their knowledge, for I thought that by so doing I might glean something to my own advantage. They reached the spot where I had been standing, and I saw that they were gesticulating violently. High words were passing between them. Carlos seemed the coolest of the two, for the flashing eyes and flaming face of the other told plainly of ungovernable passion. I saw my friend lay his hand upon Fernando's shoulder, apparently to calm him. The other grew still more excited, and, without perceiving its dangerous vicinity, drew nearer the edge of the cliff. His object seemed to be to avoid the hated touch of a rival. I was on the point of warning them, but checked myself, for I thought I should gain little by my interference. I could not hear what they said; but from Fernando's violence, I could perceive that the conversation had turned upon some subject very near his heart; and I concluded it related to Maraquita, and that Fernando was threatening Carlos in the same manner he had threatened me. "How passion deforms and distorts a man!" I thought as I quietly watched the scene from behind my rock; "what a lowering of one's nature, to give way to such impulses!" I forgot how often I had done the same. A base, a horrible idea entered my mind. I thought that if

both in their excitement rolled over the cliff, two obstacles in my path would be removed at once. Fernando stepped back, and drew his poniard, the very poniard I had seen once before glittering in his hand. Carlos, who was unarmed, made a sudden dart as if to snatch it out of his hand. Fernando still stepping backwards, unaware how near he was to the edge of the cliff, prepared to strike; but at that moment his foot caught in a bramble, and losing his balance, he fell from the enormous height, and a distant splash in the sea below, told us of his terrible fate. I shivered with horror. One was gone in the midst of his rage and his earthly thoughts, how would it be with the other? Carlos stood as if transfixed; then uttering a loud and terrible cry, he rushed to my hiding-place. I know not what impulse led him there, but he did not seem surprised at seeing me. He uttered a few broken sentences, "Oh, John, have you seen —have you seen all? Tell me, tell me, I am not a murderer!"

"You are not. I *have* seen all," I replied, hardly knowing what I said. He made no answer, but rushed forward in the direction of the town. It seemed to me the height of imprudence to go there, for he would be sure to be suspected of having murdered Don Iago's son, if both had been seen to leave the town together, as was most probably the case; and on the other hand, if he fled the neighbourhood, it would seem like an acknowledgment of guilt. He probably had no settled plan, but acted entirely upon impulse. I remained

on the spot for some time, thinking over the strange events that had taken place, and trying to make up my mind, and resolve upon some plan of action. Notwithstanding my horror at the manner of his end, I could not help feeling a secret joy that Fernando was out of my way; and I wended my way back to the town in a more comfortable frame of mind than I had when I quitted it. If Carlos should get into trouble by this event, it would be all the better for me. O foolish soul! why did I not remember those lines the good old rector loved so well:—

> To rise by others' fall, I deem a losing gain,
> All states on others' ruins built, to ruin run amain.

As I re-entered the town, it was in an unusual state of bustle. A crowd was collected in the market-place, and I had difficulty in threading my way through it.

"What has happened?" I asked one jostling spectator, who seemed to be trying to see something that was invisible.

"Have you not heard? A terrible murder has been committed. Don Carlos Mandrano has murdered Don Fernando Ballasteros, and all for love, they say, of the beautiful Donna Maraquita, the governor's daughter. He has given himself up to justice. Look! look! there he goes."

And the crowd pressed forward to look at a guard of soldiers who were crossing the other side of the square. Though at some distance, I could distinguish the tall, erect figure of my friend, as he passed, apparently handcuffed, from one street to

another. The spectators were full of pity for the murderer, though they evidently took his guilt for granted. Such a crime was not thought unpardonable in Spain, and the youth and handsome appearance of the supposed culprit enlisted on his side the sympathies of the mob, who were busily occupied in conjecturing when the trial would take place.

"Don Iago has vowed to pursue him to the grave, even should he be acquitted," said a newcomer, who had heard and seen more than the rest, and evidently wished to enhance his importance by giving an authentic account of what had taken place.

"Then he will do so," replied one of the bystanders. "He is one of the most relentless men in Christendom. But come and see the spot where the murder was committed; Diego told me it was somewhere on the south side of the bay; he will show us. Come, come!" And followed by many of the crowd, he moved off in the opposite direction to that where it had really happened.

"What fools most men are!" was my reflection, as I moved from the scene. "How ready they are to run after anything that excites their morbid feelings!"

I went to my own lodging, and sat down absorbed in melancholy. I ought to have hastened to the prison, and tried to gain admission to Carlos, or at any rate visited his aged mother; but how could I, myself a hypocrite all the time, [illegible] that would happen.

Of course, as he had given himself up to justice, there would be a trial, and as no one but myself was present at the death of Don Fernando, I should be called upon for my testimony as to whether it was caused by premeditated murder, a scuffle in the heat of passion, or by a pure accident. At one time I thought of leaving the town, and returning when all was over; but I could not prevail upon myself to desert the place whilst Maraquita remained in it. One thing even surprised myself, accustomed as I was to my own eccentricities and inconsistencies. This was the very little affection I now felt for him I had once so loved. My passion for the commandant's daughter absorbed everything. I took no interest in other subjects; I cared not what might happen, as long as I succeeded in this. But what a base, what a horrible part I should play, by remaining silent, when my witness would be of so much importance! Never mind. What was the use of thinking about it then, before I had been asked for it? Besides, was not Carlos my enemy, my rival? "All's fair in love and war." I was master of the situation, and I considered myself right to make use of it.

I would go that evening to the Alameda, and try to discover in what manner Don Carlos's arrest had affected my beloved. I went; I paced up and down amongst the pleasure-seekers until sunset, but saw no Maraquita and no commandant. Surprised at this, I hastened to their home. The house seemed silent and almost deserted; the shutters of the lower rooms looking into the court-yard were

shut, and no signs of life were about the place, excepting a great dog, who barked at me savagely. In answer to my inquiries, I was told that the family were engaged, and could see no one. Crestfallen and disappointed, I returned to my lodging, and could hear, as I passed, little knots of people commenting on the strange events of the day. I cannot write down every little thing that occurred to me on this momentous day, the recollections are too horribly vivid and real to me. I have no more bright and smiling scenes to chronicle, no quiet rural landscapes to depict; all is black, guilty, and terrible. I will pass over it as quickly as I can.

Night had closed in, and I was sitting, gloomy and abstracted, in the darkness of my own room, when I was informed some one was waiting to speak to me. Without giving me time to say whether it would be agreeable to me or not, the person who sent the message glided in, and as my landlady returned with a light, I perceived my unexpected visitor to be a Capuchin friar, attired in the dress of his order. I could not restrain an exclamation of surprise.

"Hush!" he whispered, in tolerably good English. "I would not have it known by any one, save you and this worthy woman, that I am here. Leave us alone, my friend," turning to her; "I have something to say to this gentleman." And when she had left the room he continued, "I am confessor to Don [illegible], and he has sent me to conduct you to his house. We must go quietly and secretly. Are you willing to come with

me, for he has weighty matters to consult you upon."

I was unwilling to go, for I dreaded some trap. I knew Don Fernando had considered me to be his rival, and had probably imbued his father with his views, and therefore I did not anticipate an agreeable interview with the old man, especially as his disposition was one of those which are apt to be turned savage by grief. The friar saw my hesitation.

"You had better come," he said; "the matter concerns yourself also. No harm will befal you, but much may go wrong, if you refuse to attend Don Iago's summons."

"But it is so late," I replied. "Will not to-morrow do?"

"No. The darkness is essential to our object. We wish the interview to be perfectly secret."

"I will come," I answered.

The friar did not speak again, but preceded me down the stairs. We went through several streets till we came to a quarter of the town where I had not been before. It looked dark, deserted, and gloomy. We stopped before an old mansion with handsome carvings over the door, of which I could just perceive the dim outline, and the lower windows were barred, as was mostly the case with the houses in C——. This was the abode of the Ballasteros family. The friar entered without ringing or knocking, and beckoned me to follow. We found ourselves in a small, plainly furnished lower room. A lamp was suspended by chains

from the ceiling, and threw a strong light over the haughty, grey head of the bereaved father. He did not rise when we entered, but slightly bowed his head, and motioned us to sit down. He was sitting near a small table covered with papers, and leaning his arms upon it, and as he turned his face towards me, I was moved to pity by the cold, stony expression of despair that it bore. He spoke slowly and gravely, as was his wont; but his voice had descended several tones, and was deep and hollow.

"You were present, Mr. Aylmer, at the death of my son?"

How did he know that? I wondered. I hesitated to commit myself, for I knew not to what this questioning might tend. He continued somewhat hastily,—

"You need not deny it. The prisoner, Don Carlos Mandrano, swears that you were present, and that you acknowledged, in answer to a question of his, that the occurrence was an accident, and not a murder." He looked right through me with his piercing eyes. "You need not be afraid to tell the truth," he continued; "I am more anxious for his conviction than you can possibly be."

How could he thus interpret my thoughts? how could he know the secret wish that I felt to get Don Carlos out of the way?

"I am determined," he continued, and his eyes glowed with fiery rage—"I am determined to ob-

tain, by some means or other, the death of that man, whose family I hate. His father killed a relation of mine years ago, and ever since I have been watching for an opportunity of revenge. It is true Carlos has not personally done me any harm; but he is a dangerous fellow, a pestilent reformer, and the country will be well rid of him. I have sent this night an express to Madrid, and I anticipate a speedy trial. My influence at Court is great, and a judge in whom I have great confidence will, I anticipate, be named for the commission. I need hardly tell you," he continued, with a sarcastic smile, "that justice is not administered here, as it is in your country. The most powerful carries the cause. Now, you are the only witness that can be produced in favour of the prisoner, and I wish and intend you to keep out of the way until the cause is decided."

The very project that had entered my own head seemed to me monstrously wicked when proposed by another.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Betray my friend to gratify your revenge!"

"And your own love," he added. "You cannot deny your wishes with regard to Maraquita. They were plain to every one. My poor son considered you as the only rival he really feared, though I discovered through this worthy father that Carlos imagined his case was not altogether hopeless."

"Then," I exclaimed, my heart beating fast, "if

Maraquita's feelings are already interested in my behalf, what advantage would accrue to me from the course you propose?"

"That is easy to be seen. Carlos has Don Antonio on his side. Before he left for Madrid, he made his proposals to the father, and Don Antonio, instead of accepting them immediately, appointed a certain time of probation, at the end of which Carlos was to be allowed to address the daughter."

I was struck dumb with astonishment. At last I managed to articulate,—

"Your son told me a very different story. He assured me that the project for his own marriage with Donna Maraquita dated from the childhood of both; that her father and mother approved it; and that he only awaited the consent of the lady herself, which consent he felt sure of obtaining."

The old man smiled; a bitter ghastly smile it was, and one very painful to look upon.

"Fernando told you that, did he? Well, it was like him, very like him. But, nevertheless, it is not true."

I was astonished at the cool manner in which this was said. Don Iago seemed to think nothing of fastening on his dead son the reputation of a liar.

"I mean," he continued, "that there never was any such understanding. Don Antonio behaved honourably by my son; always gave him a fair chance; and once I have reason to believe exerted his influence with his daughter, and tried to induce

her to accept him, which was very prudent on his part, as my son would have had a large fortune, and Don Carlos a small one. Now, however, that my poor son is gone——," here his voice failed him, and I was left to imagine the rest of the sentence.

It is difficult to give an idea of Don Iago's voice and manner during this conversation. It was that of a man who had nerved himself up for a great effort, and afterwards would fall back into a state of despondency. Revenge seemed the one desire of his soul; for, he said, if Don Carlos did not murder his son, he was the cause of his death, by quarrelling with him on such a perilous place.

Then he asked me to give him an exact and minute account of the scene I had witnessed. I did so, suppressing and concealing nothing; for there was a force of will about him that compelled me to obey him. He heard me to the end without interruption. The confessor was present all the time. At last he said,—

"Do you not see that by remaining here you run great risk of being arrested as an accomplice in the murder? You were seen to leave the town this morning; you were seen to return from the place in which the murder was committed; Don Carlos has declared that you were present during the affray, and these points might easily be brought in circumstantial evidence against you. You had better follow my directions, and conceal yourself."

"I cannot leave the town," I replied. "I must watch over the fate of my friend."

"Your friend!" he repeated, in a tone of intense scorn. "But since you will not believe me, I will show you something that may alter your determination; though, by doing so, I perhaps commit a breach of confidence." He turned to the confessor, "Give me, father, the letter I received half an hour ago from Donna Maraquita." He handed it on to me. It was written in a minute female hand, and after a passionate burst of condolence, the contents ran thus:—"My father is so affected by the terrible event, that he can see no one, speak to no one. For Heaven's sake, if you see Mr. Aylmer, tell him to conceal himself. The police are even now seeking him. Do not let any one know I have sent this; I have no one to warn our English friend, and his life is very precious to—Maraquita."

"How strange for Donna Maraquita to have written to you!" I exclaimed, a momentary distrust taking possession of my mind.

"Not at all. I am the only person to whom she can now with propriety apply. You may think it strange that Don Antonio should be unable to overcome the horror of this occurrence, whilst I am outwardly calm and composed, but my mind has never given way to useless grief; no, I am the companion of something better than sorrow, I am the sworn friend of revenge." He looked terrible whilst he was saying this, and I saw there was little hope for poor Carlos.

"Don Iago's deeds are more terrible than his words," broke in the friar, for the first time during

this strange conversation. "He wastes no time in useless regrets. This Mandrano is an enemy to the Government, an enemy to Holy Church; he must be got rid of; and by aiding in this you will be doing a good work, and forwarding your own salvation."

"Talk to me not of my salvation," I replied, angrily; for there was something that revolted me in the wicked and hypocritical look of the wily ecclesiastic. "I will never believe that salvation can be forwarded by murder. Speak to me, if you will, of my own interest, of Maraquita's love, of Don Iago's vengeance; but mingle not holier themes with your diabolical proposals."

The confessor was startled by my vehemence, and remained silent.

"No guilt will attach to you," said Don Iago, calmly. "You will merely follow the dictates of prudence and self-preservation by keeping out of the way."

"But where am I to go?" I asked. "I will not leave the town, for I wish to have it in my power to appear, if I judge it right."

"You need not leave the town. All is prepared. You will go with this worthy father to an obscure lodging in another quarter, where you will find everything you left in your former lodging. You must not return thither, as it is essential that you should not be seen to leave it."

"How on earth," I exclaimed, "did you make so sure of my acquiescence in your plans?"

"I generally count upon success in all I do," he

replied, with a quiet smile. "My confessor will conduct you to your abode, and will visit you every day, and relate to you the condition of affairs. You must be prepared to keep quietly in concealment for perhaps a month. It will be a dull life for you, but I will do all in my power to render it bearable, and any communication you may wish to send to Donna Maraquita this holy father will take charge of, and the answers shall be forwarded to you in the same manner."

This proposal did away with the last shadow of opposition from me. I assented, and placed myself entirely in his hands. After all, there was something noble and generous in the old man's character. I had been his son's rival, and yet he bore me no malice on that account, but was ready to forward my schemes in every way, as long as they did not interfere with his own revenge.

"I am sorry I cannot offer you an asylum in my house," he said, well pleased apparently with my consent, "but at present it would not be safe; and I cannot offer to visit you during your seclusion, for I might be observed. These Capuchin friars have ways and means of concealing their motions which we know nothing of. Trust yourself to Father Pio, and your safety is assured. Good-night and farewell."

I bowed and withdrew. The friar drew his cowl over his head, and, taking me by the hand, led me through a number of small dark streets. We stopped at the door of a small, square, modern-looking house. The friar, instead of ringing, gave

three distinct sharp knocks with the knuckle of his forefinger. The door was opened half-way, and a password muttered by some one from within, which was answered by my companion. We entered. An old man with a lantern showed us upstairs, where I found two much pleasanter apartments than the one I had left, and all my possessions down to the minutest article.

They had been removed from my former lodging during my interview with Don Iago, and I could not sufficiently admire the way in which my comfort seemed to have been cared for.

"Now," said the friar, "you have nothing to do but to sit down and write to the fair lady, if you wish it. But I must entreat of you not to intrust the letter to any one but myself. I will be with you to-morrow morning, and bring you all the tidings that I hear."

I bade him good-night, and followed his advice. As Maraquita had expressed her fears for my safety, she would doubtless be well pleased to hear of my seclusion, and so I began by thanking her heartily for the warning she had sent me through Don Iago, and assuring her I would obey her instructions; then I inquired after her father; and concluded by hinting at my own eternal affection, and the happy days that I trusted were in store for us both, after this heavy cloud should have passed away. This letter gave me abundant occupation, for I wrote it and re-wrote it over and over again, and it drew towards morning ere I consigned myself to my uneasy slumbers.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST STRUGGLE.

THE Capuchin was true to his word, and appeared early.

"No news," he said, shaking his head, in answer to my inquiring look. "Don Iago has been in a state of high fever all night, though he would be very angry if he knew I revealed his sufferings to any one. The conversation with you, and the effort he then made to conceal his feelings were too much for him, and he is now paying the penalty. I hear that search for you is being made everywhere, so you must be careful not to stir out. I will stay and keep you company part of the day."

He sat down and entered into conversation. He was a well-informed, clever man, had seen much of the world, as, instead of being confined to one convent, he had been sent on missions to various countries, and the hours flew quickly which he enlivened with his rapid and varied talk. At last he arose, and taking a book from his pocket, requested me to peruse it carefully and give my opinion upon it when he came again the next day. He received the letter to Donna Maraquita with great courtesy, promised to deliver it safely, and bring me a reply. I was charmed with the urbanity of his manners; there was something so courtly, so considerate in

all he said and did, such delicate flattery, such a nice perception of my peculiar tastes and fancies. I felt as if I would willingly turn Romanist to have the privilege of confessing my sins to him.

He came again the next day, and the next. Every time he brought me some little note from Maraquita, in which she exhorted me to keep concealed. She said not a word in answer to my declaration of affection, and my curiosity was kept alive by this. But if she did not assent, she was certainly not offended, or else why did she continue answering my letters? She said not a word about Don Carlos. It was a subject too important, or too insignificant, to be mentioned. Every day did we exchange missives, and I learned to live upon the hour when the Capuchin appeared. This state of things continued for some time; I saw no one but the friar and the old man who attended to all my wants. I suppose this old man to have been one of Don Iago's retainers; he hardly ever spoke to me, and when I addressed him, his answers were monosyllabic. I was so engrossed with Maraquita's letters, the Capuchin, and the abundant occupation he found for me, that I thought very little about poor Carlos and the perilous situation he was in. One day the Capuchin was much later than usual. At last he entered with a peculiar expression on his face.

"I am late," he exclaimed; "the streets were crowded, and in a state of great excitement. The trial is just concluded."

"And the sentence is?"

"Death," he replied.

* * * * *

It is difficult, nay impossible, to describe the torments I endured after this announcement. It was some time before I could listen to the detailed account of the trial; and when I heard that the want of my testimony had decided the case against my friend, my brain was almost on fire. It was all the confessor could do to prevent my rushing into the street.

"I will go," I shouted. "I will tell all I know, be the consequences what they may; and I will die with my friend, if I cannot exculpate him."

"And Maraquita?" said the Capuchin.

That word stopped me. The confessor continued,—

"Nothing you can do would now be of any avail. The probability is, that your testimony would not be believed, and that you yourself would be arrested as an accomplice. You can do no good to him, and may do much harm to yourself. Be advised by me, and remain quiet."

I controlled myself; and, seeing that I was utterly unfit for conversation, he left me sooner than usual. I dared not ask him when his sentence would be put in execution; I dared not ask him how Carlos looked, nor what he said. Before he went, he briefly mentioned Don Iago, and said that his illness was still unabated. He paid me his usual visit every day, but never alluded to the topic we were both thinking of. Once, I remember, he said, after a long silence,—

"Soon your dreams of happiness will be realized; there will be no occasion for you to remain in seclusion beyond to-morrow. Then farewell to all melancholy thoughts, and a bright welcome to love and gladness."

After to-morrow! Then *it* was to take place to-morrow. Oh, horror!

That night was passed in an agony, such as even now makes my blood run cold to think of, though I have suffered many torments since. Soon every thought of mercy and of friendship would be too late. I must resolve *now* upon my course; and if I decide in favour of Carlos, no time must be lost; but I must hasten to the authorities at once. I sat in my dark and lonely room, thinking, thinking with a burning brain, which seemed incapable of taking a clear view of anything. I could hear the cathedral bell, as it slowly chimed the quarters; I could see the large, full moon gazing coldly upon me, and still the thought was ever present to my mind—"This is Carlos Mandrano's last night!" I wondered if he, too, were gazing on the beautiful clear night, and whether his mind were calm, or troubled like mine. Then the remembrance of olden days rose before me,—the quiet parish of Oakwood, the little copse which had once been our favourite place of talk, our vows of friendship, and his unchangeable affection. I leant my fevered forehead against the cold window panes, and fairly burst into tears. And yet, what demon possessed me that I did not at once do what was just and right, and bid defiance to consequences?

I know not. "To-morrow! to-morrow!" thought I. "It will surely be time enough early to-morrow. I will leave the house before the confessor comes." But, then, I thought, "And supposing my efforts should be successful. Supposing I am listened to, and the innocence of Carlos becomes apparent—what then? Carlos will again become the friend of the commandant, will be at liberty again to press his suit with Maraquita, and who knows that she may not be persuaded to accept him?" The confessor had continued every day to bring me a letter from her; but, strange to say, she still made no mention of Carlos, and took no notice whatever of the sentence. Was she so completely occupied with thoughts of me, that all other subjects faded into insignificance? This idea comforted me; and then I thought, "If so, there would be little danger to me if Carlos escaped. But, no; the confessor thinks otherwise; he is a wise man, and accustomed to read hearts; he must know best." Unable to decide anything, I laid down upon my bed, and towards morning fell into an uneasy slumber. When I awoke, the sunbeams were blazing into my room, and drums were beating in the distance. Suddenly I recollected the horrible event that was to take place, and, unable to overcome the morbid curiosity that seized me, hurriedly dressed, and hastened into the street.

Crowds were hurrying in the same direction. I followed them, and was borne along by the stream of people. The cathedral bell was tolling a funeral knell as we arrived in the great square, and I felt

cold as marble as I listened to the deep, loud, clanging tones. The place was filled with people, who were kept from the middle of it by a square of horse soldiers; and I could see through the glittering line the horrid apparatus of death. Such was the agitation of my mind, that I cannot now understand how I could have seen and remembered everything. But so it was; my sight, my hearing had grown painfully acute; my nerves were excited beyond endurance; and the whole picture of that dreadful morning is engraved on my brain with a distinctness never to be effaced. I remember even the expression, half of horror, half of curiosity, on the face of a woman by me, who was trying to hush her frightened child. A small scaffold was erected in the middle of the square; a chair was placed upon it, with the back firmly fixed against a short, stout post. My friend, then, was to perish by the garotte. But I would yet save him; he should not die. The crowd was silent, and awed. A few were muttering prayers for the condemned. A deep seriousness reigned on the faces of all present. They behaved as if they were already in the presence of the dead. We had not to wait very long before a mournful procession came forth from the little street that led to the jail. First came the soldiery, then the clergy chanting litanies for the dying, and then —but could that pale, attenuated face belong to Carlos, to my Beauty? It did, indeed; there was no mistaking the expression of those dark, flashing eyes, that looked upon the multitude with scorn

and sorrow. He was in his shroud, and moved along so majestically, so proudly, that but for the funeral garment that he wore, and but for his pale and suffering face, one might have taken him for a young king going to his coronation. I remained there, gazing, stupidly gazing, as if I had been the merest stranger, and scarcely started as the melancholy *cortège* drew near the place where I stood.

Did he see me? Did he see the traitor-friend who had not been near him once during his sufferings? Yes; his eyes rested upon my face, and pierced me through and through. Suddenly, and for a moment, the dismal chanting stopped, and Carlos cried out in English, "Aylmer! Aylmer! you will have to save many, many lives, ere you can wash from your soul the stain of my death." This loud and bitter cry astonished all near; but none understood it, save the guilty soul to whom it was addressed. I rushed forward, but it was too late. Carlos was quickly gagged, and the procession moved on. I tried to reach the scaffold; but the crowd was too dense. "Let me pass! let me pass!" I cried; "it is a matter of life and death!" The crowd close to me opened; but I had to struggle violently to make even a small progress through the mob beyond. I heard the whispered remarks of those who stood close to me. "Look at the poor, handsome youth," said one woman; "he is now making his last prayer." "And they say it was all for a love quarrel," remarked

another. "Hush!" said a third, as all present knelt down to join in the Paternoster. *I* did not join; I threaded my way through the kneeling figures, hoping yet to be in time; but just as I reached the line of soldiers, the fatal screw was turned, and Carlos was no more. I fell upon the pavement; it was a wonder I was not trampled to death by the crowd; but I was reserved for a still more bitter fate.

* * * * *

When I awoke to consciousness, I was alone. The square was empty; and, but for the scaffold still remaining, all the past would have seemed a dream. The corpse had been removed, the cathedral bell had ceased tolling, and was now chiming for Mass. The sky was blue and cloudless. I walked in a dreamy manner, hardly knowing what I was about, to the lodging I had occupied when I first arrived in the town.

"We have been looking for you some days, sir," said the voice of my former landlady, as I opened the door, quite forgetting my change of residence. "We have been searching for you everywhere; for this letter was sent here some time ago, with instructions to give it you as soon as possible. The messenger said it was most important."

I snatched it out of her hand in breathless suspense, for I recognised the handwriting of one who would never put pen to paper more. It was a letter from Carlos,—a heart-breaking, agonizing letter, in which he implored me to come and de-

clare his innocence. He spoke of his sufferings, of his widowed mother, of the unappeasable animosity of Don Iago, and besought me, by our old friendship, to come and stand by him in this extremity. "Oh, Aylmer," he continued, "save me from a disgraceful death; save the honour of our family, which is to be sacrificed to an unworthy desire of vengeance. You know that I am innocent; come forward, then, and say so. There is no danger to yourself, for no one would dare to harm an Englishman. Why have you not been near me? Why have you not sent me one line of comfort? Can it be from an unworthy, an ignoble fear of compromising yourself? No; I cannot believe it. I misjudge you. Perhaps now, even, you are supporting and consoling my poor mother. Oh, forgive me! for I hardly know what I write; and besides the thought of my mother, there is another that nearly drives me mad. Maraquita! dear Maraquita! why do I love her so much? Aylmer, soon we were to have been married—very soon. Judge, therefore, what the agonies I endure must be! *She* does not believe me guilty—*she* will visit me—she will comfort——" Here the writing was so confused I could not distinguish the words; and after a line or two it concluded abruptly, "I can write no more. Each moment will be an hour until I get an answer from you or see you. Come, come to your brother, Carlos."

As I read this beseeching letter, now of no avail, the blood in my veins turned first to fire and then to ice. I was obliged to read it again, twice,

thrice, before I could comprehend it. And then part of the letter was still inexplicable. What could he mean about Maraquita? Was he deceived, or was I? Another hour should put an end to all doubt upon the subject. I turned quickly round, and walked in a terrible state of excitement to my lodging. What demon possessed me, thought I, that I did not go there at first, and so have avoided receiving this ill-fated letter?

To my astonishment, on entering my room, I found the Capuchin seated, and evidently waiting for my return.

"Well," he exclaimed, rising, whilst a sinister smile played round his mouth, "we have succeeded well in our scheme."

"Don't say *we*," I answered, indignantly; "*I* had nothing to do with it."

"Humph! Now, take my advice. The best thing you can do is to leave the country as soon as possible."

"How?" I asked, in astonishment. "And Maraquita, Maraquita?"

"You will never see Donna Maraquita more. She and Donna Dolores take the veil to-morrow in the convent of the Annunciation."

"And the letters she wrote me?" I shouted.

"Were all written by myself, as well as the letter to Don Iago."

"And my own?" I again exclaimed, restraining my rage until I had heard all.

"Here they are," he answered, throwing down on the table a heap of my foolish daily love-letters.

I sprang at him with the rage of a tiger. But he drew a pistol from beneath his cloak, and kept me at arm's length. The instinct that makes us all cling to life, even when life is no longer valuable, restrained me. Uttering a low growl of savage hatred, I threw myself on the floor, and the confessor left me alone with my misery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OLD SCENES.

IT was a beautiful Sunday evening in spring when I next paced along the road that led to my native village. The hedges were covered with bright blue speedwell, the apple-blossoms mingled their snowy white and blushing pink blossoms with the light green of the bursting foliage, and the long shadows spread across the meadows. I could see the roof of Oakwood rising out of the trees that embowered it; I could hear the church bells softly chiming for evening prayer. Three years had passed away since the events related in my last chapter. During all that time I had been a wanderer on the face of the earth, seeking rest and finding none, having ever present to my mind the dying face of my friend, and having ever ringing in my ears his last awful cry,—"Aylmer! Aylmer! you will have to save many, many lives, ere you can wash from your soul the stain of my death." I have no very clear recollection of what passed during those three years, though up to that time every event is distinctly impressed upon my mind; I only know that I had no aim in life, that I wandered from

town to town, and from village to village, making no friends and no acquaintances, weary of existence, and yet not possessing the courage to end it. At last, I determined to revisit my native village without making myself known, and try to discover what had become of all those I had known in my happier days. One longing desire possessed me—a burning, frantic wish once more to see my old home. I was not afraid of being recognised. No; sorrow and remorse had too well done their work; and besides that, a large beard concealed the lower part of my face, and my clothes were old and dusty.

And so I went on till I came to the old gate leading to Oakwood, the old gate with the stone posts. The stone balls had been replaced, the road had been trimmed up, and the place appeared prosperous and well cared for.

"And who lives here, my friend?" I asked of a man in a smock-frock, who was leaning over the gate.

"Farmer Aylmer," he answered.

"What, the old one?" I asked, for a nameless dread possessed me.

"No. He be dead two years ago, and so be she. Farmer Tom do live there now."

I had no heart to ask any more questions, but went slowly on to the churchyard, where I soon found the two mounds that marked the graves of my parents, whose deaths, I, perhaps, had hastened. They were close to Sophy's grave. Not

far off I read the inscription over the tomb of the good old rector; and in other parts of the churchyard I traced the resting-places of many I had known. I could not weep any more, the fountain of my tears was dry. I went into the church, and seated myself behind a pillar at the west end, nearly under the organ-loft, where few could see me. Here I waited until the service began. I had a full view of all who entered at the west door, though they could not see me. I saw Mrs. Vere enter, accompanied by her mother-in-law and Florence. They were little changed; and I thought I had never seen anywhere three such happy and contented faces. Then entered Miss Clarke, accompanied, to my astonishment, by Emmeline Faulkner. I drew myself further back as I observed the latter, for I trembled lest she should recognise me. The next group consisted of a husband and wife, the latter leading a little child by the hand. "Oh, Mary! how could you forget me?" I was on the point of crying out, but stopped myself just in time, as she walked up the aisle by George's side. These were followed by many others, amongst whom I saw my brothers with their wives and children. I heard not a word or a note of the service, but was at last roused to attention by the tones of Ernest's preaching. The sermon was on the subject of Repentance, and every word of it seemed, in my heated imagination, to be addressed expressly to me. Oh, the agonies I suffered during that heart-searching discourse! When it was over,

I mechanically followed the crowd. Miss Clarke and Emmeline were the last, and I overheard the latter say,—

"Dear Miss Clarke, this is my last Sunday here."

"Yes, my dear. How I wish you could stay longer; but your husband would not thank me were I to propose such a thing."

Then she, too, was married! They had all forgotten me, it seemed. And yet, what could I expect?

Once I thought of going to Ernest, telling him everything, and asking his advice. I walked up the aisle, and stood at the vestry door. I seized the handle; but before I could turn it my courage gave way, and I retraced my steps and fled from the church.

I must leave the place instantly. What business had I, a murderer, to pollute the happy village with my presence?

As I passed the outskirts, I perceived a pretty cottage standing a little way off from the road. Mary was sitting on the lawn, and by her side was the little child I had observed in church.

"Come, George," she said, in the tones once so familiar to me, "tea is ready, and you can finish gathering those flowers afterwards."

He came towards her, his hands full of white pinks and wallflowers, and his face beaming with such a happy smile, as if his cup of bliss were full to overflowing

"Look, father," said the little boy, "look at that ugly tramper man; he has been staring at mother a long time."

George turned his face towards me, but before he could answer I was gone.

THE END.

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